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THE GROWTH OF THE NEW TESTAMENT



# THE GROWTH OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

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BY

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## PREFACE

THE publication of this book is due to one man, and one alone, a name honoured in Congregationalist circles, and respected in the world of letters, as the great authority on Bunyan—I mean Dr. John Brown.

When Professor James Moffatt's *Historical New Testament* appeared in 1901 I tried to give my people the advantage of that rearrangement of the books. At length, three years ago, I was so impressed by the gain which comes from seeing the literature in the right order, that I determined to preach on the books in their order, at brief intervals. It took me over two years to get through them all. Among my hearers was Dr. Brown, and he was convinced that the work I had undertaken for my own congregation would be serviceable to a wider public. He so impressed me with his conviction that I undertook what is to me now the very severe labour of recasting the sermons for publication. I quickly discarded the idea of preserving the sermons as sermons; the stenographic reports were too diffuse and wordy. There was nothing for it but to use the notes and to write out the gist of the argument as concisely as possible. The advantage of the study is two-fold; first, it enables the reader of the New Testament

to grasp the fulness of certainty, authenticity, and spiritual power, with which the New Testament literature begins, and throws the right atmosphere of practical experience and assurance about the gospel-narratives, when in due course they come ; but secondly, the right arrangement brings out the growth of the Christian ideas in clearness and fulness up to their consummation.

The first impression might be that the discovery of development within the New Testament would lead us to expect a further development afterwards, with the result that the New Testament could no longer be regarded as a closed book, a Canon, a complete authority for faith and practice. But one of the advantages of chronological rearrangement is that a new fact emerges : the New Testament is so far a unique, a complete, a final authority, that within its own limits the signs of arrest appear, which developed more rapidly in the works of the sub-apostolic age, and led on to the decline and corruption of the Church in the Middle Ages. That is to say, the New Testament exhibits a growth, a culmination, a finality, and its closing pages, the Pastorals, James, II. Peter and Jude, reveal the beginnings of a recession, the intrusion of lower ideas. We thus reach a conclusion which seems singularly conservative by adopting the results of the most drastic criticism, viz. ( that in the Apostolic Literature, which constitutes the New Testament, we have the highest standards, the fullest revelation, the completest guide for the Church. ) The way of reform, and of advance, will be always a return to this fountain-head, where the

river of life broke out with astounding clearness and force from the person of Jesus. Perhaps one other result of the study may be mentioned in advance : it becomes clear how genuine the inspiration of the New Testament is, and how glorious and sufficient is its revelation, and yet how little that reality depends on verbal accuracy or guaranteed inerrancy. The treasure is in earthen vessels that the excellency of the glory may be of God. If this book helps students of the Bible, preachers, teachers, and honest seekers after truth, to Dr. John Brown must be ascribed the praise. On the other hand if it is found otiose in the multitude of books which pour from the press, if it fails of its audience, or finding its audience fails of its effect, the fault lies with the author who has not been able to justify the generous confidence which Dr. Brown reposed in him.

ROBERT F. HORTON.

*September 1st, 1913.*





I

I. THESSALONIANS

A.D. 53



## I

## I. THESSALONIANS

A.D. 53

THIS is the earliest document of the Christian religion which has come down to us. If with Zahn we date it in the spring of the year 53—though some scholars would bring down the date to six years later—it was written twenty-four years after the crucifixion of Jesus. If Jesus had lived on He would have been under sixty years of age at the time when it was written.

We have before us, therefore, a strictly contemporary witness to the origin of Christianity; and it comes from the pen of one whom we know more intimately than anyone in antiquity.

What does this opening page of Christian literature imply as to the truth, the contents, and the working forces of the Gospel?

How intensely interesting is the enquiry! This letter was written in what might have been the lifetime of Christ. It is the first clear utterance in literature of that religion which is now professed by the leading and most progressive nations of the world.

We watch the tiny stream trickling from its grassy bed, which is to gather volume and force, and flow

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through history, making and made by it. We get at the point of view from which the religion is to be understood and interpreted.

Paul and his companions, Timothy and Silvanus, had been driven out of Thessalonica by the fanaticism of the Jews. Strange to say, Salonica to-day is still predominantly Jewish! From the epitomised narrative of Acts xvii., we should not know that any converts, at any rate from heathendom, had been made by the visit; but the letter shows that some had turned from idols, and that the missionaries had left behind them a church, under the direction of presidents who would carry on the work of organizing, instructing, and enlarging the church. This rapidity in gathering and forming the church is a mark of the first age which may yet have a lesson for the missionary enterprises of the twentieth century.

All had come about so quickly, that when the "apostles," or missionaries had been unceremoniously expelled, they could not be sure that the work had struck root. Paul himself could not go back to enquire: "Satan hindered him." But Timothy went and brought the news that the infant community was standing fast in the faith, though there was some consternation at the death of certain members of the society. For Paul had led them to believe that the coming of Jesus was quite near, and they feared that those who had passed into the shadowy land would miss Him. The most pressing motive for writing the letter was to reassure them on this point. But behind

this immediate object, the spring of the letter is a yearning love. The converts at Thessalonica had become "beloved" to Paul. He felt bereaved in being parted from them; he thought fondly that they might feel bereaved too.

This letter is like that of a mother who has just parted with her boy on returning to school—her thoughts follow him, her heart feels his troubles and difficulties; she must write at once.

These are the contents of the letter: First there is the greeting, and then to the end of the third chapter all is in that personal vein which makes the document a letter and not a homily. He is thankful for the Christian life of these people, and for its origin (i. 2-10); he dwells tenderly on its connection with his ministry among them (ii. 1-12). He severely censures the hindering Jews (ii. 13-16). He explains his anxiety for his converts, how he had sent Timothy, and what comfort his report had brought him. Then he breaks into a fervent prayer for them (ch. iii.). Prayers in letters are a mark of Christianity. From the beginning of ch. iv. the letter becomes more of a homily, such as the writer had been giving to the people while he was with them. He urges them to sanctification, to brotherly love, and to diligence in working for their living (iv. 1-12). Then he deals with the coming of Jesus, and comforts them concerning those who have "fallen asleep in Jesus" before His coming, urging them to be watchful and ready (iv. 13—v. 11). He adds some pithy injunctions as to the social and



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religious life which they are called to live, and again breaks into passionate prayer for them (v. 12-24). He asks for their prayers, and closes with greetings and the exquisite benediction: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."

Nothing in the letter, as a letter, is more significant than those two ejaculatory prayers; they strike a new note in human relations, cemented by the relation to God in Christ Jesus. Look at them together: "May our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you! And may the Lord make you increase and excel in love to one another and to all men (as we also do to you) to establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the arrival of our Lord Jesus with all His saints" (iii. 11-13). And, "May the God of peace Himself sanctify you perfectly, and may your spirit, soul and body be kept entire, blameless at the arrival of our Lord Jesus Christ! He who calls you is faithful: He will do it" (v. 23, 24).

Now looking at this letter, as it comes fresh and warm from the heart of an apostle, ask what it implies. Suppose for a moment that this were the only document of primitive Christianity which had come down to us, what should we have known concerning the origin, the character, the potentiality of our religion?

Really it is amazing how much is told or implied in this short utterance, and how little of Christianity is left out.

1. At once there is the name, the Lord Jesus Christ,

coupled with that of God, the Father (i. 1, iii. 11). And it is evident that a great message, an instruction, had come to the earth in Him.

“It is no exaggeration to say that the phrase ‘in Christ,’ or ‘in the Lord,’ is the most important single phrase in the New Testament. It is the key to all the Epistles. Christ is imagined as a great divine sphere, vast as the love and grace of God. He who by faith enters that sphere crosses the line of circumference that separates a state of sin and condemnation from a state of justification and holiness.”

This new divine sphere of the fact of Christ is immediately before us. A new order, a new community, has come into the world by virtue of the Person who had lived and died and risen from the dead. The new order issued from Judæa (ii. 14), but had already passed over into Europe and had appeared in a Macedonian city; and it was evident that the Jews were opposed to it.

We should know, if there were no New Testament but this one letter, that the Jews killed Jesus (ii. 15), and that He rose again from the dead (iv. 14), that He died for us (v. 10), and the message that came through His life and death was holiness, resurrection, salvation (iv. 2, v. 7).

Not only was He risen, and the pledge of resurrection to those who believed in Him, but He was coming again. That Parousia, as it is called, or Advent, to use the Latin term, is the expectation always present in Paul's mind. The Lord may come at any time, as

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a thief in the night. We should not from this letter know that this phrase was used by Jesus Himself (Matt. xxiv. 43), but we should have, unconsciously, words of His own set before us (ii. 19, iv. 15, v. 2, 23).

This one brief writing, therefore, would of itself set Jesus Christ before us, and show that He, by His life, death and resurrection, had established the Christian community.

2. As Jesus is so manifest, so also is the Spirit. The Gospel came in power in the Holy Spirit (i. 5); the joy of receiving it was from the Holy Spirit: the Holy Spirit is given to those who believe by God, (iv. 8); and the injunction occurs not to quench the Spirit (v. 19).

Thus plainly in the first Christian document we perceive that conception of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which we have tried, however imperfectly, to express in the doctrine of the Trinity.

3. Another point which becomes immediately plain is that the fact of Christ, and all that is implied in His coming, is to be conveyed to mankind by messengers, "apostles of Christ," as they call themselves (ii. 6), missionaries who are impelled to carry the word to everyone, because it is not their word, but God's (ii. 13). It is indeed the good news of God (ii. 2, 8), or the good news of Christ (iii. 2). A message from God in Christ is entrusted to men to deliver to men; and at once the character of these messengers of Christ appears. They might claim authority, as the bearers of so divine a message, but they behave gently,

as a nurse with children (ii. 7), or as a father with his own children (ii. 11), toiling and bearing, ready to impart, with the message, their own souls (ii. 8). When the missionaries appoint ministers to labour among the community, to be over them in the Lord, and to admonish them, they are to be esteemed highly in love for their work's sake (v. 13).

Thus we may say that the place, purpose and character of the Christian ministry are fully set forth in this first Christian document. The new type of religious teacher is defined, the man conscious of coming from God with a message of love and salvation, which makes him tender and self-sacrificing, and ready to impart his very soul to others in order to make them partakers of the divine truth.

4. But what is the message, derived from the revelation of God in Christ, and carried by the messengers of Christ from Asia to Europe? It is defined in a word as *Salvation* (v. 9). By that is meant a life after death, a life with Christ in a world to come; but meanwhile, and as the prelude to that after life, a life lived here and now of a certain type.

It is amazing how clear this life is made, considering the brevity of the document. The characteristics of Christianity as a religion, which is also a morality, appear in their startling distinctness. The message is the announcement of a present life, good, loving, peaceful, joyful. Its three notes are Faith, Hope and Love: "Your work of faith and labour of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (i. 3).

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" Let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for an helmet the hope of salvation " (v. 8).

This is the " complete steel " in which from the first the Christian soldier is clad, this in conjunction with that purity (iv. 1-7) which to us has become a fundamental demand of the moral law, through this Gospel which here begins to be preached. But then, and apart from this Gospel still, the sanctification here aimed at is not desired, or desired so faintly that it is never likely to be attained. Even Epictetus, the noblest and purest teacher of antiquity outside Christianity, after recommending abstinence from the kind of impurity suggested in ch. iv. 1-7, adds : " At the same time, do not be severe on those who do not abstain. You must not regard it as anything very serious."

What a revolution the Gospel wrought ! The message comes from God, that He bids us be pure, keep our bodies as inviolable vessels, as the abode of the Holy Spirit, regard marriage as purity, but other sexual connections as open to Divine vengeance. This implies incidentally a new status of women, and a new idea of the home.

But the life is one of brotherly love ; the new tie formed between those who have received the message is recognised as the peculiar teaching of God (iv. 9) ; it is capable of indefinite extension, it is to put forth an arm, like the mist on the mountain pines, and creep from nation to nation until the earth is covered and mankind is one brotherhood (iv. 10).



At the same time this life of ideal virtues—love, purity, peace, joy, prayer—is to be one of work—hard, honest manual labour, by which the means of living on earth are secured (iv. 11). “But thou, son, be not filled with idle dreams,” is the gist of this idealism. Though a great revelation has come, opening up a world of spirit, beyond this material world, for the present we are in and of the material world, and we are called to industry. Here is the explanation of the fact that Christianity produces industrialism and invests it with a real, though a relatively lower, religious value. Labour is necessary and honourable. Working with your own hands you earn your place in the world and contribute to the welfare of the community. This sober common-sense is part and parcel of the exalted message. Because Christ came from God (He also wrought as a carpenter) you become a good workman.

5. But the most startling factor of the new religion is the promise of the resurrection to those that are in Christ. Those who die in the faith are described as falling asleep in Jesus (iv. 14), or, rather, the Greek reads: “If we believe that Jesus died and rose, so also will God bring with Him through Jesus those who have fallen asleep.” (Christ has made a community of souls over whom death has no power; dead or alive, according to the human terminology, here or there, they are one and inseparable in Him. Fallen asleep, that is all. The body has fallen asleep, just as it does every night, but the living person, made one with

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Christ, comes at His coming, is with Him where He is, is near to us, as He is. The day of consummation will come, when from the heavenly places the Lord will descend, and the reunion of those who loved and lost will be the crowning act of salvation, redemption indeed, from the horror and cruelty of death.

Was there ever spoken to the sad, mourning, bereaved family of man a word of comfort so great and tender? The heart of the reader goes out in love to the writer of this passage, and still more to Him Who has thus by dying and rising again taken away the hopeless sorrow of the world (iv. 13). "We that are alive" (iv. 15). The writer in the year 53 believed that he would be living at the Lord's Parousia. But the spiritual value of the idea would not be altered if that expectation was to be disappointed. The new life, now beginning in the world, should it last for centuries or millenniums, would always be determined by this principle; men who believed would be like men waiting for their Lord.

The last page of the New Testament, viz., ii. Peter, accords with the first, in the prominence given to this attitude of expectation. It was necessary to remove the disappointment occasioned by the unexpected delay of the Coming; but it was equally necessary not to weaken for a moment the expectation itself.

The Christian life is from the first a life sanctified, solemnised and cheered by the great thought that Christ is coming, and He may come to-day, or to-night. The Parousia may be that promised return, or it may

be the death of the individual, but it certainly and always is that presence of Christ, through the Holy Spirit, that gives value and beauty to daily life. That imminent coming is the perpetual call to purity, to brotherly love, to holy diligence, to the sober use of the world, without abusing it. Everything unfolds itself, as under the eye of an unseen Lord, Who may at any time be seen. Nature becomes a parable that reminds of Him; art becomes a means of presenting Him to the eye or the ear; science is the mode, or one mode, of understanding Him. Literature is the record of the facts, which it is the object of life to grasp and to realise.

Religion is the vital and practical realisation of this all-pervading truth. Its institutions and observations and rites only aim at giving to this truth its right value in our own lives, and in the life of the world.

Thus the earliest Christian document presents us with the main outlines of Christianity. It shows us the Church as a community of brothers who salute each other with a holy kiss.

Well may such a letter be read to all the brethren, Jews (as some think the word may indicate here) and Gentiles (v. 27).

And the appropriate close of a letter presenting this new life of a new community, formed by the revelation of God in Christ, is: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."



II

II. THESSALONIANS

A.D. 53



## CHAPTER II

### II. THESSALONIANS

A.D. 53

IN the autumn of the same year, Paul heard that the infant church at Thessalonica was "disturbed from its sober mind and disquieted" by the supposed imminence of the Coming of the Lord. A letter had been sent to them, professing to come from Paul (this opens our eyes to the practice of writing letters in other people's names, which was common at the time, and employed sometimes in good faith, but sometimes, as on this occasion, in bad) which had produced an alarming effect.

The expectation of a catastrophic end may be an occasion of desperation and negligence. In Tunis, the end of the world was expected on November 13th, 1899, and one paper reported: "The Israelites are sending their wives to pray in the synagogues, and most workmen have ceased work. Debtors refuse to pay their debts, so that trade is almost paralysed. On Monday last one of the cases before the Tunis native court was that of an Arab who sued a Jew for a small sum of money. The debtor asked for fifteen days to pay, but the Arab refused because the world would be destroyed before then. The Jew was sent to prison."

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Such a derangement of life, arising out of the expectation of the return of the Lord, must be guarded against, and this supplementary letter to the Thessalonians, calming the excitement which had been caused by the truth mentioned in the former letter, is at the beginning of the literature of Christianity like a hand outstretched to calm the agitated minds of the Church. A voice says: "Hush, be calm; the announcement of the Lord's Coming is not to disturb, but to keep you in joyful peace; it is not to interrupt the business of this present life, but to make it calm and effective."

The Jews in Thessalonica had also been persecuting the infant Church, and that constant result of accepting the truth of Christ, the hatred and ill-usage of a bigoted or interested world, must also be met by a few words of encouragement and sympathy.

This letter, designed to meet the twofold purpose, is an almost unbroken exclamation of thanksgiving and prayer, suggesting that all the perils and sufferings of the new life can be met in that way. In the greeting there is a slight amplification of the words used in the former letter. The grace and peace are invoked "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (i. 1-2).

Then comes a thanksgiving for the patience of the persecuted, and a fiery denunciation of punishment on the persecutors, at the Coming, followed by a fervent prayer for the members of the church (i. 3-12).

Then he proceeds to calm their minds concerning the Coming, by assuring them that it was not to be immediate. There must be an apostasy and a revelation



of a man of lawlessness. Something, or rather someone, stood in the way and must be removed, before the dénouement could take place (ii. 1-12).

Immediately he passes again into thanksgiving for the calling of the Thessalonians, and offers for them another prayer (ii. 13-17).

In the third chapter, as in the former letter, he asks for their prayers, bids them to avoid even a brother if he is disorderly, quotes his own example of manual labour as an injunction to work and to live an orderly life. At the same time, the disorderly brother must be treated as a brother and not as an enemy.

Again, there is an ejaculatory prayer: "May the Lord of Peace Himself ever give you peace in every way! The Lord be with you all!"

To save them from forged letters in the future, he calls attention to his sign manual, and closes again with the benediction: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you," and he adds: "all!" There is in this brief letter a luminous atmosphere of trust and joy which would calm the agitated and excitable, and bring consolation under the distress of persecution.

The crux of the letter is ch. ii. 1-12: "the little apocalypse of St Paul," as it has been called. To calm the excitement caused by the expectation of the immediate Coming of the Lord, he assures them that it will not take place until a usurper has entered the sanctuary of God, and given himself out to be God. At present a restraining power was at work, well-known to the readers from oral communication which Paul

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had made at Thessalonica. When that restraint should be removed, the man of lawlessness would be revealed, in order to be slain by the Lord's coming. By this daring usurper all who believe not the truth but delight in iniquity would be deceived.

The interpretation of this apocalypse—clear enough to the original recipients of the letter—is too obscure to make it of much value to us now. Once it was thought that the lawless usurper was the Roman Emperor, Caligula, Nero, Domitian, claiming divine honours, and worshipped as God by the grateful or interested Provincials of the empire. But that view does not bear examination. The Emperor did not sit in the sanctuary and give himself out to be God; he only accepted the courtly adulation of his subjects, and the wise emperors treated the flattery with indulgent scorn. Vespasian, dying, said: "*Deus fio*, I am becoming a God!" sarcastically, no doubt. Further, the phrase: "that which restrains" or "he who restrains" would, on this interpretation, be meaningless, because if the man of lawlessness was the Roman Emperor, he was already there when the letter was written. And, now that the whole line of Roman Emperors has disappeared, and the Lord has not yet come, the proposed interpretation can only be maintained by proving the prophecy to have been a mistake.

If the apocalypse is to be treated as serious and practical we must suppose that the lawless one will be here when the Lord comes, to be destroyed by the manifestation of His coming. At the same time we

cannot regard the lawless usurper as a manifestation of the future altogether, because Paul says: "The mystery of lawlessness doth already work."

The Reformers of the sixteenth century saw in this prophecy a remarkable delineation of the Papacy. The "one that restrained" was the Roman Emperor. When the emperor declined the Papacy appeared. Much in the claims of the Pope seemed exactly to fit the language of v. 4: "He that exalteth himself against all that is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he sitteth in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God." The newly-elected Pope is placed on the altar and the Cardinals kiss his feet. At the time of the Reformation there was a place in the *Corpus Juris Canonici*, in which occurred the phrase: "Our Lord God the Pope." Language suitable to God is addressed to the Pope as His vicegerent on earth. Prayers to him are put up in the porches of churches. The late Father Tyrrell, not long before his death, wrote a letter to *The Guardian* (December 16th, 1908), describing the tract *De la Devotion au Pape*, dedicated to Pius X., in 1904. Mark xii., 30, is applied to the Pope: "Thou shalt love him with all thy mind, with all thy will, with all thy heart, and with all thy strength." "Since the Pope represents God on earth," said the writer, Arsène Pierre Milet, "we ought to love him, although in a subordinate degree, as God himself. When we fall at the Pope's feet to offer him the homage of our minds, and to accept his teachings, it is, in a sense, Jesus Christ whom we adore in his Doctrinal

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Presence. If we truly love the Pope, nothing will be dearer to us than the Pope's will ; and even when obedience to the Pope means sacrifices we shall never hesitate to follow any direction whatsoever emanating from Rome."

Cardinal Merry del Val wrote to the author of this tract expressing the Pope's satisfaction with it as a work of intelligent piety, worthy of a devout priest. This Lamaism, as Father Tyrrell called it, certainly seems to fulfil the forecast of the Apostle in an incredibly exact degree. If the Reformers were justified in their interpretation, this early passage of Christian literature clearly foreshadowed the whole course of history, and promised that the Lord Jesus would stay with the breath of His mouth the lawless one, and bring him to naught by the manifestation of His Coming.

The protest against the Papal claims would thus lie on the opening page of the New Testament, and the promise of final deliverance would be given as soon as the "mystery of lawlessness" began to work.

But we cannot prove conclusively that this is the reference of St. Paul's Apocalypse, and unless it can be proved it is wiser not to urge it. Many millions of our fellow Christians offer homage to the Pope, and cannot see in this passage any forecast or warning of the system to which they are attached. Charity forbids us to wound the feelings of sincere Christians ; and we do well to leave aside an interpretation which can claim not certainty but only probability.

We must be content to say that "a falling away" and a blasphemous usurpation of the divine prerogative was foretold, and that the Coming of the Lord would finally destroy the delusion and the lie.

The severity of judgment on those who believe not (i. 7-10) stands out in sharp contrast with the salvation in sanctification of the Spirit which comes to those who believe the truth (ii. 13). We cannot tone down the terrific announcement. If the Lord Jesus Christ is coupled with the Father, if He is coming to be glorified in His saints, and marvelled at in all that believe, they who obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus incur, by an inevitable necessity, eternal destruction from the face of the Lord.

We cannot play fast and loose with truth. The splendour and glory of a proffered gift are the measure of the loss and the darkness of refusing it.

We can only bow our heads and pray fervently for ourselves and others, that we may be counted worthy, that we may be steadfast, stablished in every good word and work, and ready for His coming.

The brilliance of the hope has, as a correlative, the darkness of the doom; we cannot receive the former without believing the latter.

Thus the New Testament introduces us at once into a serious world of momentous issues. Christ has come and is coming; we are obliged to choose and take one side, with Him or against Him. Since this event has happened, and this message has come, the world of easy drifting, of confused issues and half-beliefs,

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has passed away. A choice must be made; there is a moment to decide; the opportunity goes by for ever.

This literature, of which we are studying the first pages, gives an extraordinary urgency and push to life. It shakes us out of lethargy and dreams, and forces us to an issue. There is the glorious offer, so beautiful that it dazzles the imagination; but it cannot be made without at the same time opening the blackness of darkness which is involved in refusing it. The blinding flash of lightning leaves the pitch darkness of the night the more intolerable.

There are men who "know not God and obey not the Gospel" (i. 8.) There are "unreasonable and evil men," men who "have not faith" (iii. 2.) We may be of their number; we may be seduced by them; we may seduce others. On the other hand, there is the brotherhood of faith and mutual love (i. 3), the atmosphere of eternal comfort and good hope through grace (ii. 16). There is the love of God and the patience of Christ (iii. 5). That is the contrast; that is the choice; that is the world of living issues to which we are come.

On one side or the other! With one company or the other! We cannot evade or slip past. We are forced to decide.

That is the mark of the whole New Testament literature.

If God has chosen us for this salvation (ii. 13), if we are come into the new society of redemption, there is ground for ceaseless thanksgiving. Really, what does

anything else matter ? We are free of the kingdom of heaven ; we have come into " the peace at all times in all ways." We have but to live in lowly faith, and a future opens before us, sure, lovely, eternal, divine. The possession is so inclusive, so imperishable, that, come what may, we ought to be giving thanks always.

But if praise should be continuous, so also should prayer. Delusions and errors abound. Disorderly walking is only too easy. We may become light-headed, filled with foolish phantasies. But the way of duty and labour is a great security. Paul, working night and day, to earn his bread and not to be a burden to others, is the example for all apostolic lives. Prayer, work, quietness, honest earning of the bread, and peaceful eating of it ; how plain and unromantic it seems. Yet, that is the way ; that is the life which presently glows with an unearthly light. We must keep clear of those who are not set on this path of obedience ; and yet we must not treat them as enemies, but admonish them as brothers.

Yes, a serious, earnest life, with an outlook, sober earthwards, but radiant heavenwards. The powers may be against us, but the eternal Power is with us. At any moment our Lord may come ; the door must be on the latch ; we may hear the fall of His feet in the morning at cock-crow, at noon, at eve, or in the silence of the night. That is a reason, not for quitting our duty, ceasing to work, becoming busybodies, but for never being weary of well-doing. Meanwhile, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is already with us ; we can go

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on along the path of love and service in such a frame of mind that we could at any moment meet Him with welcome in our eyes.

“ O life, how blessed, how divine,  
High life, the earnest of a higher !  
|Saviour, fulfil my deep desire,  
And let this blessed life be mine.”



III  
GALATIANS  
A.D. 53



## CHAPTER III

GALATIANS

A.D. 53.

“ You see with what large letters I write unto you with my own hand.” The writer had taken the pen from the amanuensis, who had been writing at his dictation, and wrote the concluding passage of the epistle in the way to which he calls attention.

The “ large letters ” may have been due to Paul’s bad eyesight, but probably they were only large for emphasis. They italicise his words.

We may say of the whole epistle, in this sense : “ with what large letters it is written ! ” For, though it is so short, that I read it through while the express stopped at Swindon, yet it is one of the greatest productions of the pen or the brain of a man. It was probably written in the year A.D. 53.

It contains a piece of autobiography. It gives a glimpse into the churches of S. Galatia, Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, founded in the first missionary journey of Paul. But the interest is deeper, far deeper. ~~X~~ The fickle minds of the Galatians had been disturbed by Jewish Christians, who claimed that Gentiles must be Jews first and Christians after.)

The burning question was : Should Christianity be

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a modified and extended Judaism, or was it a new and original revelation of God? If the Judaizers, as we may call them, had carried the day, Christianity would not have reached this Island, and we should be no more interested in it than we are in the Judaism which is still with us. If Christianity had been merely a sect of Judaism, it, like Judaism, would have been confined to the single race, the race which had been trained in the Mosaic Law.

Paul, in this letter, gained such a decisive victory that our difficulty is to realise that there ever was a danger. But Judaism was a system of hoary antiquity, of unfaltering self-confidence, of great moral authority. The Apostles were Jews; Jesus was a Jew; there was every temptation to defend and conserve the older revelation, and to graft the new upon it. At Jerusalem itself that temptation was peculiarly strong. Paul's unique mission was to establish the independence of Christianity. He fought almost single-handed. He succeeded by virtue of the Truth which he defended. In a sense this letter, which shows the weapons and the manner of the warfare, is the record of a victory gained once for all. But its interest remains always living and pertinent, because Judaism recurs in other forms. Religion conceived as Legality, salvation earned by merit, insistence on outward forms, to the neglect of the inward spirit, represent the steady trend of the human mind. And Paul's conflict with the claim of the Judaizers is couched in such terms that it applies to every form of recrudescence of Judaism. This

epistle is the perpetual protagonist of religion conceived as spirit, as grace, as an inward holy life. It keeps the original and unique character of the Christian religion for ever to the front, in contrast with the systems which preceded it. ✕

Christianity is not an adapted Judaism, but a new and revolutionary power ; that is the burden of the epistle to the Galatians.

The autobiographical passage in the first two chapters is not dictated by a spirit of egotism. It arises out of Paul's desire to show his independence of the Judaic Christians. He recounts the earlier movements of his Christian life, proving that they resulted from a direct communication of Christ to his soul, and not from conference with those who were apostles before him. His call to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles was a commission given to him by Christ himself. The apostles at Jerusalem could impart nothing of importance to him ; they, James, Cephas and John, were the first to recognise that he had an independent authority, that he must go to the Gentiles, just as they in the main confined themselves to " the Circumcision."

It is very noteworthy that so far from Peter being the Infallible Head of the Church, this opening phase of the New Testament literature shows Paul resisting him to the face, " because he stood condemned " (ii.11). The piece of autobiography is thus a suggestion of spiritual freedom ; it leads to the expectation that Christ will always manifest Himself to souls, outside the regulations and limitations of officialism. If Peter

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stands for Catholicism, Paul stands for Protestantism. From the epistle to the Galatians Protestantism springs ever with fresh power, so soon as Catholicism and Peter's chair claim the monopoly of Christian truth and authority.

The autobiography is an apology, written with the eagerness and rush of the apologist, and not in the mood of quiet reminiscence ; it is not, therefore, to be pressed for dates and other details ; but it is a psychological document, revealing the genesis of Christian faith and apostolical authority in a human soul.

To bring out the originality of his gospel, and its superiority to that of the Judaizers, Paul institutes a comparison between Judaism and the true Christianity.

X The one is legal, formal, fleshly ; yes, fleshly, because its initial rite was not moral or spiritual, but simply an operation on the flesh. The best, therefore, that can be said for it is that it was a preparation for something better than itself. X The Law was like that slave in the Græco-Roman world whose task it was to take the boy to school, and hand him over to the master.

The pedagogue, *i.e.*, "child-leader," was merely a slave. The Master of the school was Christ.

The other, his Gospel, is spiritual, inward, life-giving. There is only one Gospel, though he calls it "my Gospel" ; the Judaised Christianity is not a Gospel, but only the Law in another form.

Thus the Gospel detaches itself from the chrysalis in which it was first born, *viz.*, Judaism, and begins to bring its own bright way through the world.

This is the point and the gist of the epistle, and the main thought colours the phrases from the beginning.

I.—The Introduction i. 1-10 is much longer than that in 1 and 2 Thess. At once the writer announces himself as "an apostle not from men nor by a man," but (and note the order) "through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead," that Jesus Christ who "gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us out of this present evil world."

He wonders that his converts could be removing from his gospel to another. Well, let them have it straight and plain, there is no other. Does this blunt dogmatism sound like the conciliation and attempt to please men, with which he was charged?

II.—This almost explosive Introduction prepares us for the autobiographical apology, i. 11—ii. 21. Here we read Paul's life, as it appeared from the inside. Of course, it is different from the record in Acts. What man's inner experience ever corresponded to the impression made on contemporaries or historians? The vivid interest of the passage comes from the self-revelation it contains. The conversion described three times in the Acts, as a scene on the way to Damascus, is by the subject himself described thus: "when it pleased God to reveal His Son in me."

Afterwards the phrase is expanded. Christ was revealed in him in such a way that it was in a sense no longer he that lived, but Christ that lived in him. The visits to Jerusalem mentioned in Paul's reminiscences wear a different complexion from that which

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is given them in history. In history the striking fact was the harmony between Paul and the other apostles. In Paul's own mind the striking fact was his independence of them. He did not go up to Jerusalem at all for three years ; he withdrew into solitude, in order to learn his Gospel from Christ. When he saw the apostles he found that he had got beyond them. He already knew more of Him from his inward experience than they could show him by outward events. Fourteen years afterwards he went to Jerusalem again with Barnabas. His ground was then taken. He would not let his Gentile companion, Titus, be circumcised. He would not listen even to the leading apostles, when they tried to impose Judaism on the converts as a condition of a full Christianity.

〔He stood on a distinct, to him authoritative, experience.〕 He had died to the Law ; Christ was living in him ; Christ, who, to use that startling phrase, the very kernel of Christianity, “ who loved me, and gave Himself up for me.” 〔He declined to nullify the grace of God, as he would do if he admitted that righteousness came by the Law, if he depended on the rights and privileges which Judaism conferred, and not exclusively on Christ who died for him.〕

Here was an apostle, committed, by a great personal experience of Christ, to detach Christianity from Judaism, and to vindicate its independence. A Jew, loving and obeying the Law himself, he had come to another plane of spiritual life than that on which the



Law operated. It was vital and fundamental to maintain that the new plane of the Spirit could be reached through Christ, without the Law.

III.—The dogmatic kernel of the epistle occupies chs. iii. and iv. It turns upon the doctrine of the Holy Spirit—sixteen times in this short letter is the Spirit mentioned.

The deeds of the Law never brought the Spirit ; the Spirit came by faith in Christ crucified. This is a startling light on the psychology of the Christian religion. The fact seems so familiar to his readers that a plain assertion is sufficient. The preaching in those Galatian towns had been a graphic "presentation"—one could almost imagine from the language an actual pictorial representation—of Christ crucified. (The hearers believed, believed that He had so died, that He had given Himself for them, for their sins, to deliver them out of this present evil world.

With that, faith in those who heard the Spirit came. They began forthwith to live by the Spirit, and to walk in the Spirit. The Spirit was in their hearts, giving them the consciousness of being the sons and daughters of God.

Now, if this new life of the Spirit came by faith, how foolish and perverse it was to think that it could be continued, developed, in a word, lived, by material and fleshly means ! A life begun by faith, and not works of the Law, cannot be lived by the works of the Law, but only by faith.

This argument seems to slight the Law. Paul

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remembers what a factor that Jewish Law has been in the world, even as a preparation for the Gospel, and he suggests a daring line of reasoning to show that the Law was an interlude in the primal and natural line of spiritual development. This flight of apostolic dialect is exhilarating, like a journey in an aeroplane; it rushes over seas and mountains. The ages shrivel up; we survey the beginnings and the end of time. The original principle of religion, in the call and the life of Abraham, was faith. The righteousness of the Patriarch came, not through works of the Law—the Law was not yet given—but by faith. That was the primal covenant between God and man; it could not be set aside by any subsequent additions.

In the local law of the Galatian province a testament was guaranteed against any alterations by codicils. To this fact Paul appeals for an illustration. There is a play on the word, which, in Greek, means "Covenant" or "Will." That covenant between the Patriarch and God could not be set aside by a subsequent code of Law, any more than a man's will could be altered by the additions made to it afterwards.

[The soul is, and always will be, justified by Faith, not by works of Law.] The Gospel took up the primal principle of religion, as it existed in the time of Abraham. Christ crucified, as the object of faith, and the means by which the Spirit comes, was the fulfilment of the promise given to, and in, Abraham, father of the faithful, *i.e.*, of the believing.

The Law, on the other hand, coming 430 years later,

served its purpose. It could not supersede the Covenant of Faith, it could not secure the Spirit ; but it could bring out clearly the fact and the nature of sin. By its specific prohibitions it made men aware of their opposition to the Spirit. It could not give the Spirit, but it might spur them to seek the Spirit by faith. This legal system was necessarily imperfect ; it was mediatorial ; it did not bring men into direct relation with God, but left them always with the law-giver, a mediator between them and God. Religion in its pure intent is an im-mediate relation with God. That reveals the whole difference between the Law and the Gospel. In the Law, the mediator, the priest, the code, the system, stands as the object and the material of religion. A man gets no farther than the intermediaries. But in Christ man comes into immediate relation with God. No mediator is needed or possible. Christ is not a mediator, but God Himself in contact with the soul. Believing in the Son of God, we become sons of God.

Before Christ came even pious people were servants, bond-servants rather than sons, like the heir to an estate in his minority. The "rudiments" of the world, as Deissmann has shown, meant the tutelary spirits which paganism imagined in stars, in trees, in streams, and all material things (so Col. ii. 8, 20, and possibly 2 Pet. iii. 10, 12). Before Christ came, religion was always this bondage to intermediate spirits. But the Son of God came, born of a woman, under the Law, to redeem men from the Law ; when men

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believed on Him the Spirit within began to say, Abba, *i.e.*, Father.

And now, asks the eager, yearning apostle: "Are you going back to those rudiments, to the servitude, to the Law? Having begun the life of the Spirit, do you think of living a life in the flesh, a life which brings no cleansing, no peace, no progress? It is heart-breaking. I have wasted my time on you. I preached a Gospel; you go back to a Law, which is no Gospel at all."

He reminds them of their enthusiasm at first, when, in the joy of receiving Christ, they wanted to give their eyes to the preacher whose own eyes were ailing. And then he rushes into another daring argument, an allegory. Hagar and Sarah are made to stand, the one for the Law, the other for the Gospel. Sarah's sons are identified with the children of Abraham the faithful; the Israelites proper are relegated to the ranks of the children of Hagar.

Of course the argument is not illuminative to our minds, as it would be to a Judaic community. But the gist of it all is plain. The Gospel means Liberty from the Law as well as from Sin, sonship instead of servitude, a goodness which consists not in the toilsome observance of an external law, but in the free and joyful obedience to an inward principle—this is the liberty with which Christ has made us free.

We pass then to an ethical application.

IV.—The religion of the Spirit, the righteousness by faith, is before all things an ethical life. This life is described in a contrast, which is a companion picture

to the contrast between Judaism and the Gospel at the beginning of the letter (v.—vi. 10). The freedom of the Spirit stands over against the bondage of an external law. Circumcision? that is only a cutting of the flesh—would that they who insist on this as a part of Christianity might themselves be cut away! But an ethical life must be one of freedom. Does freedom mean the escape from restraint? No, the liberty in Christ is not license; it does not leave you to do what you like, to rush into sin. That is precluded by the very terms of the new morality; its method is "faith working by love." Faith in Christ is faith in a death to sin, and a life of righteousness. And Love, such love as results from faith in Christ, is a higher, nay, the highest, moral principle. It is a fulfilling of the Law; not in a forced, mechanical, legal way, but from an impulse, an interpretation, a never-failing Divine direction.

Thus the two ways open, the way of the Flesh, and the way of the Spirit.

The Flesh produces its appropriate works—impurity, superstition, malevolence, divisions, the discordant elements of pride, self-assertion, intolerance. Law brings them out, doubtless because they are there; but all law can do is to bring them out. It condemns, but cannot remove them. Flesh and Law are correlative terms. They move on the same plane. The morality and religion are one.

The other Way, that of faith in Christ, brings the Spirit, a life, a walk, in the Spirit. There is a fruit

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of the Spirit, a holy, serviceable, balanced character, the constituents of which are Love, Joy, Peace, Long-suffering, Gentleness, Goodness, Meekness, Faith, Self-control. The religion of the Spirit produces the fruit of the Spirit. Here, too, the religion and the morality are one.

You have to choose between the two ways.

Having chosen the latter, how can you go back to the former? To be Christ's is to crucify the flesh, to transcend the law, to come into the working of the Divine principle, which is the being of God, viz., Love.

The spiritual man is not proud or censorious; he is humble and always seeking to lift the fallen, feeling that he might himself fall. He is an exact contrast to the legal man, the product of the Jewish Law.

If you sow for the one character or for the other, you reap what you sow. You sow for the flesh, and reap corruption; for the Spirit, and reap eternal life.

V.—Then the letter closes with droppings of the storm which has rushed past, broken after-thoughts of the impetuous argument that is just concluded (ch. vi. 11-18). He gives his scrawling sign manual to what he has dictated. "No—no circumcision; beware of it, be rid of it." Have nothing between you and Christ; let the Cross suffice. O that Cross—how I glorify it—the separation from the world, the life of the Spirit that it has brought!

I bear, he says, the stigmata in my own person, the marks of Christ's crucifixion; my sufferings, the persecution I everywhere face; (in one of those Galatian

towns he was cast out and beaten and left for dead) my labours, my passionate pleading with you, these are the marks of the Lord Jesus.

He is a human being filled and thrilled with Christ, a personal manifestation of Christ, in his character, in his sufferings, in his achievements.

Let no one stop him or hinder him ! He is the Christ-man, carrying the Christ-gospel, the only gospel, the gospel which all the world wants. He is a Knight of the Holy Ghost.

And so he closes in *Peace*.





IV

I. CORINTHIANS

A.D. 57



## CHAPTER IV

### I. CORINTHIANS

A.D. 57.

LET us look at this letter, from which we take texts and passages so frequently for several purposes, as a whole.

We are in a living situation. Four years have passed since the first group of letters were written. Paul is writing to a Church which he established in *such* a place, in *such* a way, as we learn from the letter itself.

The place was Corinth, the central city of Greece, on the ocean highway, like Suez. The city had been rebuilt by Cæsar, and was inhabited by the descendants of the Roman colonists, by Greeks, and a number of Jews. It had a reputation like that of Paris to-day, for gaiety. The difference was that the dissoluteness in Corinth was not opposed by, but related to, the religion. The Temples of Aphrodite swarmed with the *hieroduli*; and the practices arising out of that fact made the population such that to avoid fornicators it would be necessary to keep out of society altogether.

The luxury and pleasures of the city gave rise to the saying :

οὐ παντός ἀνδρός εἰς Κόρινθον ἐσθ' ὁ πλοῦς,  
“ The voyage to Corinth comes not to us all.”

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Paul had come to this place on his missionary journey. He was interested in the famous Isthmian Games which were celebrated just outside the city, as we see from ch. ix. But the divine voice bade him stay there: "I have much people in this city." He took up his abode with a fellow craftsman Aquila, and his able wife Priscilla, that he might earn his living by tentmaking. He attended the Jewish synagogue, and delivered his Gospel there, with the result that Crispus, the *archisynagogus*, became a convert, and other leading men, Caius and Stephanas, Paul baptized with his own hands, "the first-fruits of Achaia." But this alienated the Synagogue, and Paul had to pursue his work on neutral ground and, giving lectures, as was customary in cities of Greek culture, but not, as was customary, charging fees for his lectures, a fact which was employed to depreciate and discredit him. A Church was formed, with a few educated and prominent people, but composed chiefly of freedmen, and even slaves.

The Jews became the bitter enemies of the Preacher and of his converts. An *émeute* brought the antagonism before the notice of the Roman Governor, Gallio, brother of Seneca, who, like the Romans generally, favoured the broader teaching of the Gospel rather than the narrow formalism and exclusiveness of Judaism.

After labouring for a year and a half in the city, Paul left the infant church, apparently, to the charge of Apollos, the eloquent Jewish convert from Pontus,

a community seething with the mixed ideas of Jew, Greek and Roman. We are filled with astonishment that a church of such variety and strength should have been formed in a Greek city by the labours of eighteen months, but the founder of this church was Paul, whose extraordinary genius begins to appear in the manifoldness and power of this epistle. The earlier epistles prepared us for a man of earnestness and zeal ; but here we are driven swiftly to a conclusion. " The writer of this letter is in the front rank of the writers and makers of the world. In literature, in history, in religion, in practical activity, Paul has no successful rival."

He deals with a multiplicity of questions, swiftly and decisively. Sometimes he gives his own personal judgment, more frequently he is the medium of a divine commandment. He is conscious of having the mind of Christ, and he settles everything with an authority which we cannot question or surrender, an authority which carries conviction to the reader even to-day.

He does not claim infallibility ; there are many points on which time and change might affect his judgments. But there is no mistaking the *inspiration*. The breath of God is in it all. We do not wonder that letters like this were treasured, collected, and consulted as " The Apostle." There is, it is true, the force of a great and magnetic personality ; the mind is so versatile, the spirit is so energetic and irrepressible, there is such a unique combination of the practical

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politician and of the poetical idealist, there is such a gift of bringing great principles to bear upon little things, and of raising little things to dignity and importance in the light of truth as a whole, that as a human document it would claim a definite place in literature. But the inspiration is palpably distinct from this intelligence and human genius. The inspiration is that work of the Spirit which results from faith in the crucified Christ. Faith in Christ, as we saw in *Galatians*, brings the Spirit. This letter shows the Spirit in being and in action. That spiritual indwelling, activity, and direction of Christ has a definite effect; great and divine principles emerge, which are capable of regulating all details. Changing circumstances are moulded, coloured, controlled, by these master principles, by the manifested will of God.

Paul deals with many cases, but never falls into casuistry. He goes into many details, but never becomes petty, or fussy, or pragmatic. There is a breadth of atmosphere, a free play of spiritual reality which makes the letter as useful for conditions which arise now as it was for the conditions which elicited it. Never did the universal more persistently assert itself in the particular.

The details are full of interest. After the gracious and encouraging commendation—he gives all the praise that is possible to his well-remembered and beloved converts—he proceeds to deal with certain matters, of which the report had come to him, and to

pass judgment upon them. In the second part of the letter he gives his counsel on questions which they had referred to him.

I. Messengers had brought to him at Ephesus some disagreeable facts from Corinth. His children were falling into errors and sins. He passes judgment with the decisiveness and severity of a judge.

*Firstly*, some of Chloe's slaves had described the divisions and parties that had appeared in the Church, since Paul's departure; there was a Paul-party, an Apollos-party, and (as, ever since) a Christ-party, some little group who laid claim to be Christ's, to the exclusion of all who did not agree with them. This touched Paul to the quick. "You are divided," he says, "because you are so clever. That is fleshly wisdom. The Spiritual wisdom leads to unity. Your life was raised to another plane, the plane of the Spirit, by faith in Christ. There no divisions can be maintained. One foundation is laid, even Christ, and no one can lay another. On that foundation God is building a Spiritual Temple. That other order, made of people after a new type, rebukes and condemns the spirit of faction, and the rancorous divisions of sects. Paul, Apollos, any of us, are only ministers, or stewards; we take a lowly place, let our humility teach you to be lowly too!" There can only be one party in a Christian Church, viz., Christ's party. And yet, Paul claims to be their father, who had begotten them. It is this human touch which gives to Paul's correspondence its lasting charm.

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As their father he must correct and chastise them ; for their soul's sake he must be severe.

*Secondly*, he heard that there was a case of immorality in the Church, which would be scandalous even in the corrupt society of Corinth. A man had taken his father's wife. The man must go ; there must be no flinching. It was not to be thought of that the Church of Christ should make terms with iniquity which even heathenism could not tolerate.

*Thirdly*, he understood that the members of the infant church were going to law with one another, and bringing their disputes before the secular tribunals. His decision on this question is swift and unhesitating. " Better lose " he says, " than present to the Pagans the spectacle of Christians in dispute. Let the least suitable person in the community act as a judge ; there is a spirit in the Church, the very spirit of Equity, which will, through any mouthpiece, give a righteous verdict."

*Fourthly*, there was the very delicate question of setting up the new standard of morality for regulating the relation of the two sexes. In Corinth there was no shadow of censure on fornication. In the Church that kind of connection was illicit. As the Church was the Body of Christ, so each body was the Temple of God. A temple of God cannot be used in that way ; such pollution would be a sacrilege. Here was a new morality emerging, involved in the fundamental truths of the Christian Gospel. It seemed revolutionary, or at least quixotic ; but it started the world



on a new career, laid the foundation of the home, and set woman upon a plane of security and sanctity.

2. Then he passes to the questions which had been put to him :

*Firstly*, whether celibacy is better than marriage, and especially whether a father does well to give his daughter into marriage or to keep her single. Paul answers the question by giving his own opinion ; he is quite candid in saying that it is his own opinion only, and seems half conscious that his Lord might have answered the question in the other way. You can see the wavering of his thought. Christ had raised marriage to a sanctity never before conceived by treating man and woman as made inseparable by the primal thought of God. But Paul thought celibacy better than marriage. His decision is : "if you must marry, you had better." It was not easy at once to grasp the exalted thought of Christ ; Christ's own celibacy and the exigencies of a missionary life might easily give Paul a bias in the direction opposed to Christ's view.

*Secondly*, a question was put to him which arose out of the conditions of life in the ancient world. In a pagan city like Corinth most of the meat exposed for sale was the flesh of sacrifices which had been offered in the temples. Was it right for a Christian to eat meat which had been sacrificed to an idol ? The readiest answer would have been : "Eat no meat at all, and evade the difficulty." The new morality was bent on going to the root of matters. The idols were nothing at all ;

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meat offered to them was none the better and none the worse ; you might eat such meat without injury and without offence to God. But another consideration comes in. How would such an action affect others ? Others, who had not yet got hold of the true principles, might identify the use of such meat with offering it to the idols. It would be wise therefore not to use one's freedom, but to abstain from using the meat which had been sacrificed, for fear of wounding the conscience of the weak. That opens up a far-reaching vista of moral development. It is not wise to do all that we *may* do ; we should keep a wide margin, to be determined by a principle of charity. " He who does everything he may will certainly find himself doing what he may not."

The principle thus struck out he illustrates from the conduct of himself and his comrade Barnabas. They might on the principle of Christ, that the labourer is worthy of his hire, receive salary or support from the Church, but they prefer to keep within their margin, and to labour at their crafts, in order to make their apostolic work gratuitous.

For what are we, and what are you, he asks. And with his eye on the Isthmian Games, which were celebrated close to Corinth, he answers, we are wrestlers and runners and boxers in the great Games. We dare not indulge the flesh. We must be in training like athletes. We do not take every luxury which is permitted. Our aim is, at the cost of sacrifice, to be in the best possible condition for the contest.

Thus Paul gives a brief glimpse into his own inner life, and the unrelaxing struggle which was always proceeding to repress the desires of the flesh and to obtain the self-mastery on which all noble and victorious life depends.

Then follow some directions concerning worship. Amongst other things he would have the women remain covered. He gives it only as his private judgment ; he would not press the point if it raised controversy, and yet that wish stands. Still in every Christian Church the women wear their bonnets and hats, and the men are bare-headed, because Paul expressed this sentiment in this letter of pastoral love to the Church at Corinth.

Then he had to settle the question of the Lord's Supper. In laying down these regulations he incidentally gives us the first, and the fullest, account of that sacrament, which has come down to us. The early view of it was not maintained. The vast majority of Christendom changed the Supper into a Sacrifice, and, pressing the literal meaning of the words which Christ spoke, believe that the " body " means a transubstantiation of the bread into the real flesh and blood of the Lord. But the Supper, as Paul knew it and explained it, was still a social meal. It was observed in remembrance, and in order to show the Lord's death, until He should come again. The " body " was not the bread changed into the flesh and blood of Christ, but the community, who were members of Christ's body and united in Him as their head, and by that relation

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were committed to a life of mutual love and service. To eat "unworthily" was to forget this social meaning of the Lord's institution, and to display the greed, ostentation and selfishness, which are common in earthly feasts.

The three chapters, xi.-xiii., develop this theme in a way which is clear enough unless the reader brings the later developments and the changed view back into the primitive argument, and produces confusion.

The Body of Christ, symbolised by the broken bread, is the community of Christians. In that Body the Spirit works. To each member a "charisma," or gift of the Spirit, is entrusted, that all may be welded together by mutual ministrations. But better than any individual gift is the Love that unites all in this Body, of which Christ is the head.

Thus Paul moves on to that *Chant d'Amour*, that poem in praise of Love, which may be considered the Hymn of the new religion. Just as Francis of Assisi composed a canticle of praise to produce the unity and inspiration of the Franciscans, or just as the Marseillaise was the rallying cry of the Revolution, this thirteenth chapter of the Epistle, growing organically out of the Lord's Supper, is the hymn of the Christian Church, the Marseillaise of the Christian revolution, the national anthem of the new people called Christians.

From this he passes on to a very subordinate question, the *glossolalia*, or speaking with tongues, a psychical phenomenon which had appeared in the new community

under the intense emotional excitement of the new experiences and the exalted expectations. The strong common-sense of the Apostle is shown in his depreciation of this ecstatic and irrational manifestation. He expected it to be temporary. And so it proved to be. One word with understanding is better than all these obscure and questionable utterances.

So the regulation of details reaches its conclusion.

Having passed his judgment on the things he had heard and given his answers to the questions which had been referred to him, he now states the authority that settles all these points, the Gospel. The Gospel had made the Church, the Gospel must govern the Church which it had made. The Church is not primary but secondary ; it is the product of this master-truth, the good news to men, that CHRIST DIED FOR OUR SINS, AND WAS BURIED, AND ROSE AGAIN. This leads to that earliest and fullest evidence for the Resurrection which is contained in the fifteenth chapter. He recites the several appearances of the risen Lord to the Apostles, and last of all to himself, by which the Church had been convinced once and for ever that Christ was risen. Long before any evangelist had composed a "gospel," this chapter was written, which shows how sure the fact was within twenty-five years of the occurrence, and when many were alive who had seen the risen Lord.

It was a Gospel of the Resurrection from the first.

Following on this direct historical testimony to the event is an argument which presents the rationale

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of the spiritual body which survives death, based on the analogy of nature. This kind of speculation is not final, like the testimony to the fact itself, but it is full of living interest. Myers' classical work on Personality is an elaboration of the argument after nineteen centuries had passed, a collection of the immovable facts which show that the body committed to the grave is only the corn seed sown in the ground, for a future.

Paul breaks into a pæan of praise over the resurrection. Who can say what it means for us, that we, the "tremblers beside the grave," enter into a victory over the grave. The sting of death is drawn. Christ is *our* Resurrection.

Now, turn back and look at the event, the truth, the hope, which are established by this epistle, the Gospel which revolutionised Paul, and revolutionises the world, which had called the Church into being, which was producing a new kind of individual and a new relation of individuals to one another; according to the Epistle of Diognetus: "He hath made us after a new type"; human life had taken a fresh start, humanity was entering on a new phase of its development.

Christ was the seminal principle of a new order.

Only thirty or forty years before Paul wrote this epoch-making letter the spiritual fact of Christ entered the world; and here it was, the most potent, the most creative force in the world. That name of Christ stood as the turning point in history; A.D. followed

on B.C. There the fact was for ever ; to it we could always return, as out of it we had all sprung.

He surely came. He died. He rose from the dead. When a Paul believed in Him, he became a new creature, and was drawn into the new order.

“ Christ ! I am Christ’s, and let the name suffice you ;  
Aye, for me too He greatly hath sufficed,  
Lo, with no winning words I would entice you,  
Paul has no honour, and no friend but Christ.”

Every one who believes in Him as Paul did, becomes a new creature and is drawn into the new order. All who are thus incorporated in Christ form a spiritual organism ; they are committed to personal purity ; they eat the mystic meal ; they love.

They do not really die ; for that body is risen in Christ its head. The body will grow until death and sin are vanquished, and Christ will deliver up all to the Father, the body which He has formed, and God will be all in all.

This was the fact that had come, a vast, living, working, and creating fact, the fact of Christ. The new creation began at once.

Here is that Power, which, like the power-room in the engineering sheds, is carried to every part, and can work all the machinery, can accomplish the greatest and heaviest, and also the least and most delicate, task that is required. The treatment of details is only an illustration of the way in which that central Power and Authority will always settle details. We are not bound in a bondage of Paul’s decisions, but we are

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brought into the liberty of his access to that Power and Authority, the Gospel, the truth of Christ, the Redeemer.

From the height of the great argument the writer descends to the collection, and to some personal notes. Then he puts his sign manual on the letter, which had been dictated. The sign manual consists of four brief messages, characteristic of the apostle and of his gospel :

“ If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema.”

“ Maranatha ” which is the Aramaic for “ The Lord is at hand.”

“ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”

And finally, “ My love be with you all,”—yes, all, even those who had detracted from his authority, and fallen into the errors and sins dealt with in the letter. All, for the love is “ in Christ Jesus,” and in that name there is no room for anything but love.



V

II. CORINTHIANS

A.D. 57



## CHAPTER V.

### II. CORINTHIANS

A.D. 57

IT was the brilliant suggestion of Hausrath that this second epistle to the Corinthians contains two letters—one comprising chs. i.-ix., the other chs. x.-xiii. 10; and that the latter was tacked on to the former as an appendix, to explain it.

The reason for accepting this suggestion is that the sudden turn at the beginning of ch. x. *αὐτὸς δὲ ἐγὼ Παῦλος*, is by no means a natural connection with what has gone before. The theory that Paul at that point took the pen from the amanuensis and began to write with his own hand would be satisfactory but that the turn in the tenor of the letter is as startling as the sudden intrusion of the writer's personality. The closing words of ch. ix. are full of peace and encouragement and praise for "the surpassing grace of God" which is in the Corinthians. But here, at ch. x. 1, the writer plunges into a passionate plea, a rebuke, a reproach. How can this transition from tranquillity to agitated waters be explained?

Hausrath supposes that we have here in chs. x.-xiii. 10, a fragment of that letter which is referred to in ch. ii. 4: "For it was out of much distress and misery

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of heart that I wrote to you with many tears, not to make you sorrowful, but to make you realise the love which I have for you especially," and in ch. vii. 12 : " So then, although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of him who did the wrong, nor for the sake of him who was wronged (viz., himself) but in order to make clear to yourselves in the sight of God how earnestly you care for us. Hence our cheer."

Here we have, then, attached to the main letter an appendix containing an extract from that letter written in tears, that letter from the heart which Paul sent for the double purpose of making his faulty and wayward children realise his love to them, and their care for him.

This is a happy illustration of the way in which " higher criticism " may bring order out of confusion, and shed a welcome and unexpected light upon the biblical literature. These chapters, standing where they do, unexplained, produce an unpleasant sense of obscurity ; but if we may, at the suggestion of the critic, write at their head : " Appendix containing part of the letter referred to in the foregoing," all becomes plain.

With this clue in our hands we gather that after writing 1 Corinthians in the spring of A.D. 57 from Ephesus, Paul paid a flying visit to Corinth, to compose the differences and to set things in order, as he had promised. Such a visit is inferred from the expression in ch. xiii. 1 : " This is the third time I am coming to you." But this second visit to Corinth was a

sorrowful failure. The opposition to him from the Judaizers, who claimed to be the Christ party, was led by one to whom he refers in ch. ii. 5 and ch. vii. 12. These ill-mannered representatives of Jewish exclusiveness, invading the Christian Church, sneered at Paul's low stature and lack of authority; they treated him as an interloper in his own Church; they said that he was crafty and caught the Corinthians by guile, and that he had taken advantage of them.

Returning to Ephesus, he tried to do by a letter what his presence had failed to do, and so to prepare for a third and more effectual visit. Writing in anguish and tears he vindicated himself against his opponents, "these superlative apostles," as he ironically calls them. He entreated the Church to decide for him, and not for them and their ringleader.

He defended himself, however, not from any personal motive, but because the truth of his Gospel was involved; the strong personal note only covers the sanctity of the message which had been entrusted to him.

This letter was carried by Titus to Corinth, to be "a test of their obedience," and the writer was restless and anxious until his messenger returned (ii. 13). Paul met him in Macedonia, and was filled with joy to find that the letter had accomplished its object, as well it might. How could the Church fail to be touched to the core by an appeal so moving? In a wave of passionate penitence and affection his converts returned to him, and repudiated the ringleader of the

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opposition so vehemently that Paul had to intercede for him.

The letter written after this return of Titus (2 Cor. i.-ix., xiii. 11-13) breathes intense relief and gratitude ; and we leave the Corinthian Church reconciled and hopeful, in the affection of that yearning, passionate heart which had, as it were, begotten them. The concluding words (xiii. 11-13) follow immediately on ch. ix. 15.

Let us turn now to the fragment of that second letter to Corinth which wrought so powerful a change in the attitude and temper of the Church. Certainly it is one of the most amazing productions of literature. It is a tumult of contending emotions ; it passes rapidly from love to irony, from vehement denunciation to tender pleading. It burns with Paul's fervent faith in Christ. It throbs with passionate tenderness for those whom he had begotten in Christ, whom he longed to present to Christ as a chaste virgin.

So swift is the movement that it seems incoherent. It is like a poem of Browning's ; and everything depends on following the turns, the ejaculations, the hurried allusions.

But it is for this reason a plangent revelation of a human heart, a flashlight on a remarkable personality, a biography in interjections. All Paul's minor experiences, all the sufferings and incidents of his outer work, are clashing and clanging in his eager words.

He feels that he is "foolish," senseless—though this consciousness of distraction is the clear evidence of

the central calm ; his excuse is sufficient ; reason more profound, sense more divine, justifies the apparent extravagance, the self-vindication which might sound like self-glorifying.

Never did a man appear more human. The agitated, eager, suffering heart appeals to us, as it did to the Corinthians. As we understand him we are irresistably drawn to him. Other epistles make us admire his acumen : this makes us love him.

But if we feel the attraction of the personality, we are conscious that the main element of the attraction is the grandness of the truth, the power of Christ, which works in him, agitates him, sets all the chords of his nature vibrating. As we read, and are swept along by the passion of the writer, we marvel at the new Power which had come into the world, a Power like some newly-discovered natural force, which was creating and moulding these societies, or churches, establishing them on the sure foundation of Christ, and rearing them up as temples of God, for the moral culture of men, and the drawing together of all mankind into one, as the family of God.

Allowing for the tumult of feeling, and the swift rush of ideas, which makes havoc of the grammar, and breaks all continuity of argument, we can get the gist of the letter thus : He is in the flesh as a man, but his contention is not in the flesh ; that contention is to bring every thought into subjection to Christ. He would have his life, and their life, like an organism which obeys one brain—Christ. The authority which

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he claimed on the strength of this master-thought was legitimate, and he gloried in it, not only for Corinth, his own field of labour, but for regions beyond, for the whole world. How he yearned over those conquests of his in Corinth, as those " eminent apostles " could not—they who had another Jesus, another spirit, another gospel. He was their begetter in Christ—a spiritual parent. Forgive me, he exclaims, with tender irony, that I would not take any pecuniary support from you. Those others would take it, I know ; but they are ministers of Satan, who only appear as angels of light ; they harp on their being Hebrews. He, the ringleader, is a Jew ; yes, but am not I also ? They are ministers of Christ : and am not I ? Oh, the perils and the sufferings that I have faced for His sake ! And the care of all the Churches which constantly presses on me ! Ah, the time when I was swung down in a basket from the wall of Damascus, to escape my persecutors ! And not these outward seals only, but the inner revelation ; whether I was in the body or out of the body I could not tell ; the things of the spiritual world were shown to me. I only speak what has come to me in these overwhelming manifestations of divine power. Such was the glory that God was obliged to give me a humiliation in my flesh—this excruciating pain of the malarial fever, which pierces me like a stake. I cried again and again to be delivered, but the assurance came borne in upon me that His grace suffices. My weakness became my strength—it cast me on God. It is,



of course, senseless to glory, but I am driven to it by these detractors, who depreciate my message, though they saw all the signs of an apostle in me, the wonders and the mighty works (xii. 12). And now I mean to come to you a third time, just as I came on the previous visits, to spend and to be spent for you. I "caught you by guile" they say; did I? Oh, you know I did not, nor did my messenger Titus. How I fear humiliation at my coming; you may treat me as you did last time. But I will come—the word of Christ in me will come. Oh, is He in you? I will come, though I seem to you reprobate, come with the authority which He gave me, not for this casting down, but for building up.

This was the poignant and passionate plea, or part of it, with which he won his converts back to their allegiance, with which he brought them, every thought, into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

If we follow this suggestion of Hausrath, the nine chapters at the beginning, and the four verses at the end, of 2 Corinthians would be a third epistle to the Corinthians. This letter presents Paul at the height of all his powers of heart and brain. He is master of his changing moods, and passes, as no one ever did before or since, from the particular subject to the universal principle, and from the principle down again to the most trivial details, in such a way as to present the whole of life as the harmonious expression of a divine idea. The letter seems to be about questions and interests of the moment, but it presents the Christian verities in their

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completeness. It occupies only four or five pages, but it takes us at once to the centre and to the circumference: it will have us on earth and in heaven at one and the same time. Even money matters are raised into a spiritual atmosphere. The vibrating note of it all is the Spirit. It ends, as it begins, in love and peace, and with that benediction which the Christian Church has used daily ever since: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all."

The introduction (i. 1-11) at once breathes *comfort*. The word comes again and again. Paul is comforted and wants to comfort. He is full of gratitude for the news which had come through Titus, and the heartfelt reunion with his beloved converts. He is under a spell also of solemn thanksgiving for the deliverance which he had experienced at Ephesus, from which city he had been driven by an *émeute* which threatened his life. Comfort and deliverance make a joyful peal of bells. His heart overflows with love to his people; the charges and criticisms in the two former letters are past; his only implied rebuke is, "be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." He simmers with joy in their renewed devotion, and longs to share with them the comfort that has come from them. He writes with the exuberance and demonstration which result from being happy. He expatiates on the religion which means so much to him, and in a moment of self-revelation he lays bare an apostle's life.

The spiritual character of his Gospel comes into

relief ; it shines with an unearthly light. As in a rare moment of quiet retrospect and prospect he looks back on the labours and sufferings overpast, and forward to the time when the tabernacle of the flesh will be dissolved, the language attains an extraordinary elevation, a visionary glory. It is the joy of the Lord ; the mighty Spirit breathes through it. It seems to say :

“ Take not the vision from my ken,  
And whatsoe’er may spoil or speed,  
Let me not need the aid of men,  
That I may aid the men who need.”

Now, starting from ch. i. 12, follow the eager, sinuous course of the letter to the end of ch. vii. It is a kind of unconscious self-vindication, set forth to justify the Corinthians in their renewed devotion, and to draw them to their spiritual Father with indissoluble ties.

His conscience towards them is clear ; he is what they know and acknowledge him to be. He meant to come to Corinth on his way to Macedonia and then to visit them again, “ a second benefit,” on his way to Jerusalem. He altered his intention. Why ? He does not act according to the ordinary principles, saying, “ Yes,” “ No,” as men commonly do ; there is in his life a monitor, a master, whose “ Yes ” and “ Verily ” determine his action. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, directs his course. From the heavenly side it was He who prevented the proposed visit, *en route* to Macedonia. On the human side he could not come until he had received the message from them through Titus, for he would not come to them this third time with a scourge ; he longed to come to their

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open hearts, and to rest in reconciling love. He went not by Troas, and not by Corinth, for fear that his children in Corinth should not care to see him. But what of that? He is carried everywhere in the triumphal train of Christ, His willing captive, and the incense of the pageant breathes out life unto life and death unto death everywhere.

They must not, however, think that he is commending himself again as he did in the former letter. He is not now asking for a testimonial. He does not need it. "You are my testimonial," he exclaims exultingly, "on the fleshy tablets of the heart." He needs no more, he is content. And he is indeed a minister of Christ, not of the law, but of the Spirit. Splendid was that ministry of the law in Moses, the face shining with communion, veiled that the people might not see the glory pass. More splendid is this ministry of the Spirit, which needs no veil to hide its passing, because its glory abides; turning to it we are all transformed into the image from glory to glory, as from the Lord the Spirit.

No craft was used or needed. Veiled in the perishing things of time, human hearts may not see the glory; but the veil is not on the message; in the message is the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. This glory was presented in earthen vessels, in men like himself, dead, rather than alive, but in these dying bodies Christ manifests Himself as light, and He will raise up even the bodies that He has used.

Then comes the thanksgiving because this earthen vessel of the body may decay, but the eternal dwelling abides.

Out of this spiritual certainty he pleads with them, and with all, to be reconciled to God—the time is now.

His ministry they would not impugn. What a web of sorrows and difficulties, what a kaleidoscope of experiences, it has been. But he had been a minister of God through it all. His heart warms and opens as he epitomises that ministry of suffering and joy, and into his open heart he draws his people, asking them to be open with him as he is with them; to be separate from unbelievers, to be united in this faith. The past is gone, the errors and the repentance. Now, as Titus recounts his experiences at Corinth, pastor and flock come together. He is of good courage concerning them. No shadow is upon their love; no rift is in the lute.

Then from these heights of spiritual rapture he comes down to the collection. He was collecting money from all his churches for the aid of the poor church at Jerusalem, in order to show the solidarity of the Churches gathered from the Gentiles with the original society of the apostles. But even this mundane subject is made to shine and to glow with heavenly light. The idea of Christian giving is elucidated. Gifts of money follow on gifts of self. The money acquires the moral and spiritual value of the givers, and in that, not in itself, is found its use for moral and spiritual ends. We are reminded of Burke's fine saying

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to the American colonists: "We know of no road to your coffers but through your affections." And who shall say how much this passage has done to establish the sound principles of taxation in Christian states? The whole subject of money, and of giving, is drenched through and through with ethical meaning.

The Macedonian Christians, Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea, had collected the money before Paul came, and had touched him by first giving themselves. "Will you do the same?" he asks the Corinthians; "for think of the bounteous grace of Christ. How He gave! Give as you can. If you have a superfluity, give. If you have only a pittance, give of that pittance, for the object of giving is the blessing that it brings to the giver. Let everyone share in that blessing. As the manna in the wilderness was enough for all, but admitted of no superfluity for any—if men gathered more than enough it only went bad—so be ready to give; the superfluity, ungiven, is not a blessing, it only moulders and decays."

Titus and two other esteemed brethren were coming beforehand to make this collection. Paul was already boasting in Macedonia of the liberality which the Corinthians would show. He was sure they would not shame either Titus or him. And yet he will not have the money unless it comes from love. God loves a cheerful giver. Such giving fills the Churches with praise and thanks. "Oh, thanks be to God for *His* unspeakable gift!"

This treatment of a money question should be noted.

It is novel, a mark of genuine inspiration. Money is the antithesis of religion—the rival of God. Multitudes of men value it before God. Christ regarded it with severe detachment. But it is a necessary evil in life, and when we descend from the great principles to the practical details of life, one of the first and most pressing questions is: How are we to regard money, how to earn, how to spend, how to keep it?

This question receives its answer in the light of Christ, as God's unspeakable gift to men.

Then following on this practical discussion (if we adopt the suggested treatment of ch. x.-xiii. 10) comes the beautiful and encouraging conclusion (v. 11-14). They are to salute one another with a holy kiss—all the saints—from all the Churches—send them in spirit such a salutation. The benediction is the last word to Corinth and to all the Churches: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ"—His wondrous grace to us, in what He did and does, in what He gave and gives—"the love of God," the love that gave us Christ and receives us in Him—"and the communion of the Holy Ghost"—that mystical atmosphere of true religion, in which the Gospel comes with power, and souls are saved, and built into the body of Christ—"be with you all."

At the close of the letters to Corinth, before the dogmatic treatise was written to Rome, and before the records of Christ's life were written down by the evangelists, it is well to pause and to notice how full and rich the Christianity of the Church already was in the year A.D. 57.



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If our New Testament stopped here we should indeed miss much which has become of unspeakable value for us, and we may question whether Christianity could ever have grasped the world apart from the evangelic records of Christ's earthly life, and His inimitable teaching—but we can say that no essential truth of Christianity would be wanting. The historic fact of the life, the death, the resurrection, the faith in Christ which saves, and the endowment of the Holy Spirit, which comes with faith, the Church as a society of those who have entered into a new life, and are filled with the Spirit, the sacraments of Baptism and of the Supper, the future life and the blessedness of the heavenly world, in a word, everything which constitutes a Gospel, a saving power, and a hope for the human race, is here plainly set down in these five letters which result from the missionary efforts of Paul.

And the letters are an unconscious testimony that the new faith was a missionary faith, which by its intrinsic impetus must push out into all the world.



VI

ROMANS (I.—XV.)

A.D. 58



## CHAPTER VI

ROMANS (I.—XV.)

A.D. 58

HERE are a dozen pages which we call the epistle of Paul to the Romans, but it has little of the letter in it, and much of the treatise. It is a constructive statement of a new theology, the theology which was created by the life and death, the teaching and mission, of Jesus Christ. Yet, as a treatise, how small it is. In length it is no greater than a letter, such a letter as used to be written before the days of cheap postage.

That so brief a composition should have had so wide and lasting an influence on the world is an argument for its divine inspiration. No product of the pen, that does not owe its power to artistic genius, has ever accomplished what these few pages have done. They made Augustine, who shaped and dominated Western thought for a thousand years; they made Calvin, who made not Geneva only, but Scotland, and Canada and a great part of the United States; and, more remarkable still, when the systems of Augustine and Calvin decline and fall, we go back to these pages, and find that their strength was due to the teaching of this Epistle, and their weakness resulted from imperfectly understanding the Epistle.

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This brief composition outlasts age-long systems which grow out of it ! What is the secret of this lasting influence, which throws the influence of Plato or of Aristotle into the shade ? It is not to be found in the eloquence or lucidity of the style, for much of it is obscure and chaotic. It cannot even be found in the thought ; for the thought of the book has not, like the thought of the Sermon on the Mount, established itself as complete and final in Christendom. Some of its ideas, for example those on predestination, perhaps for want of lucidity and careful guarding of the expressions, set men on wrong and misleading tracks ; and it is possible to quote from the book passages which seem to justify disastrous errors.

Perhaps no one, apart from dogmatic bias, would be able to accept the whole teaching of the book without qualification. To base its influence, then, on a doctrine of scriptural infallibility is misleading. That influence does not rest on the guarantee of the church, nor on any *a priori* demand that all which it contains should be accepted as the word of God. It is strange how an unthinking dogmatism mistakes and misrepresents the secret of power in the Bible.

The enormous influence of the little book is due to the Fact behind the book, and not to the book itself. That fact was the good news of Christ. This book was the first great attempt, tentative and incomplete as any such attempt was bound to be, to fit in that Fact with the course of human history, with the development of religion, with the experiences of the soul.

Whoever had first made such an attempt to piece together the suggestions of the Fact of Christ, would have produced a book, which, by nature of its subject, would have arrested and held the mind of man. The first systematic attempt to explain the phenomenon of Christ's life and death, coming before the narratives of the life which was sure to be written, must have broken upon the world as a *revelation*. But this first attempt was made by a mind so powerful, so virile, so passionate, so eager, so wide in its outlook, so tender in its sympathies, that the book, casual as it seems in form, and careless in style, is one of the most vital pieces of literature in the world. It loses nothing by translation; for it is the substance, not the form, the contents, not the handling of them, which constitute the life of the piece.

Only five years have elapsed since the letters to the Thessalonians were written; it is not yet thirty years since Christ suffered on the Cross. But the thought of the writer has sprung to maturity; it has mounted on wings, and obtained a comprehensive view of the significance of Christ in the world, his connection with the past, and with the future, the way in which his life and death have worked, and must always work, on men.

Reflect that the writer is, strictly speaking, a contemporary of Jesus, one who may quite possibly have been present at the trial and crucifixion, one who knew that Jesus had lived a human life, though he had not at hand the materials for writing that life himself, and

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trusted for his materials to his friends, Luke or Mark. The fact that Christ had lived and died, and had come into his own life with converting and quickening power, is the sure foundation on which his thought reposes. With amazing confidence and cogency he sets forth all that results from the fact.

He no longer confines himself to the subjective side, as he did in the other letters. He now takes up history. He sees the course of events and sets Christ and His work in its place among them. He finds in Him the light which illuminates the life of man on the globe ; he sees all religions and institutions in relation to this truth. Here is the beginning of the comparative study of religions. He views the Græco-Roman religion which prevailed in the civilised world, and the Judaism in which he had been reared, and he succeeds in showing them both as stages in God's revelation of Himself to men, transitional stages which led up to the final and inclusive truth, the truth of Christ. This truth, towards which all the ages travailed and yearned, he had to proclaim. He felt that he had in his hand the keystone of an arch, the goal of a course, the bright consummate flower of the tree of human life.

This truth is called the *Faith in Christ*. The book shows that " faith in Christ " is the final religion. In it Judaism is merged ; in it is merged the religion of the Græco-Roman world. And more than this ; every religion, every theory, conception, doctrine, concerning God and the soul, this world and the next, man as an individual, and men in society, finds its consummation

and interpretation in this final religion : *Faith in Christ.*

Here we touch the secret of the book's influence and vitality. When it was written in the year A.D. 58, all the religions known in that Mediterranean world were brought to the test of this new Truth, and were found to point to it, to demand it, to merge in it. And to that new Truth, that Fact of Christ, all other religions have been brought, as they have been discovered or formed, and they merge in it ; all conceptions, philosophical and scientific, all progress in the life and organisation of the human race, all the thoughts that " widen with the process of the suns," are still brought to this one master Truth, and they are found to be included in it and mastered by it.

It is this tough and enduring quality of the revelation behind the book which gives to the Epistle to the Romans its perennial value.

Substitute for Judaism Islam, and for the Græco-Roman religion Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and all the other faiths known to Comparative Religion, and the argument of Paul is equally valid. What seemed to be an occasional piece proves to be the universal key to the problems of the human spirit.

Glance over these fifteen chapters (leaving the last chapter as a note written to another constituency and on another occasion, accidentally tacked on to this epistle), you find that the scope and argument of the composition are clear, though details may be obscure,

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and certain passages, misunderstood or "wrested," may lead off into by-paths of error :

There is an introduction : ch. i. 1-17.

Then from ch. i. 18 to xi., the central doctrine of Christianity is expounded ; Faith in Christ, and the results which follow from it, are presented as the final religion, to which everything had led up, and to which everything now looks back.

Chapters xii.—xiii. review the moral duties, the practical conduct towards one another and the world, which the faith in Christ produces.

The remainder is personal and reminds us that the treatise is after all, a letter, a letter written in the midst of a thousand cares and duties at white heat, dictated to Tertius, his amanuensis (ch. xvi. 22), as we gather from the closing verses ch. xvi. 21-27, which probably belong to the main epistle, and not to the fragment, ch. xvi. 1-20.

The introduction is very moving. The "slave of Christ" is bringing to Imperial Rome the good news of God contained in the fact that one who was David's offspring had been installed Son of God, for the redemption of mankind. Of this gospel he was not ashamed, because he had found everywhere that it was, in his hands, a power of God unto salvation, and that it carried with it a fulness of blessing.

The sense of the incalculable treasure that he carried gave him a holy confidence. Men must desire what they so manifestly need.

Now he launches out on the dogmatic exposition



which forms the bulk of the book. He ventures on the dogma (which has now become a truism but was then a paradox) that Righteousness is the object of every religion. But righteousness was not achieved by the religions of the world. Paganism has not produced it ; and he gives a realistic glimpse into the world of his day, which, strange to say, is absolutely correct for any part of the world still in which the Faith in Christ is not known and practised. In the non-Christian world, unnoticed and uncriticised, in the Christian world criticised wherever it is noticed, the beautiful and holy sexual relation on which the race depends for existence and progress, is grossly and incredibly perverted. God is ignored, and lust reigns. So far is Paganism from producing righteousness, which is the saving salt of men and nations, that Pagan societies are always found in process of decay.

Nor had Judaism produced righteousness, though its Law seemed to seek it, and its institutions were designed to carry it out. The Jew—we might equally say the Moslem—who looked down on the Pagan, the idolater, with scorn, convinced that he had the one religion, was none the more righteous. He had an advantage in being the depository of a Law, and in the possession of a prophetic and devotional literature far in advance ethically of the other religious books of the world; but in conduct he did not greatly differ from the Gentile. Circumcised and uncircumcised were alike. Indeed, by his own Law he stood condemned, for he did not keep his Law.

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Once let the nature of righteousness be displayed, as it is in the Gospel of Christ, and mankind, Jew and Gentile, stands convicted ; every mouth is stopped, all the world is brought under the judgment of God.

Another principle was needed to produce righteousness, a principle which was unknown to Paganism and Judaism, and indeed to all religions, which universally taught that righteousness, if they sought righteousness at all, was the result of meritorious works wrought by devotees in obedience to the Law of their religion. If righteousness was to be achieved, another principle must be evoked. That other principle was not far off ; it was close at hand, like electricity before men found how to apply and to use it. The principle worked implicitly in Abraham, and verbally had been acknowledged in the description of Abraham's religion. This principle, always implicit in human life, and working undefined in human religion, had been brought out, expounded, applied, in a complete and absolute way, in Christ. *Faith in Christ* was Faith in its highest and most perfect manifestation ; a new principle working to achieve the righteousness which Law, and the toilsome effort to fulfil its requirements, always fails to achieve. For " Faith in Christ " becomes at once a new and divine righteousness in soul and life, a reconciliation with God, the love of God poured out in the heart through the Holy Spirit (ch. v. I-II).

Faith in Christ means recognition of God as holy Love, contrition for sin and repentance, forgiveness of

sin and regeneration, and love to God, which makes love to men the mainspring of life and conduct.

When Love takes the place of Law, and everything is done for the love of God and man, righteousness springs up as naturally as the flowers grow in spring ; there is no effort to earn merit, no self-consciousness or self-satisfaction in the fulfilment of the precepts of a law, but Love and its deeds are the sole merit that God who is Love values, and Love is too self-forgetful to admit of self-righteousness.

Thus " faith in Christ " gains at a stroke what all religions either ignore as unnecessary, or toil after in vain, viz., Righteousness.

And now comes what we may call the philosophy of history, of history as Paul knew it. For, according to the Law-book of Judaism, man began with Adam and his sin. Placed in the garden of Eden, and tested by a divine prohibition, man fell. The story of the Fall presents a valuable parallel to the story of the gospel. Adam fell, and his descendants fall in the likeness of his transgression. Mankind presents the picture of a continual fall. Men are not so much " fallen " as " falling." Christ came as a new progenitor of mankind, not falling but conquering ; His life and His death form a justifying deed, to which men can attach themselves, so that they no longer fall, but conquer. Thus Christ is a second Adam—a conquering Humanity.

The divine deed of the Son of God is the seed, and the power, of a righteous life. Paul sees the history of

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mankind in a compact form ; it is all foreshortened and epitomised. There is man sinning, there is the Law, introduced in order to define sin, and bring out the sense of sin, and pass judgment on sin, but in itself powerless to destroy sin, or even to forgive it ; and there is Christ, sinless, suffering for sin, founding a new order, because by faith in Him men are not only forgiven, but attached to the sin-conquering life which He began and continues. The righteousness which Paganism hardly conceived and which Judaism was powerless to produce, comes graciously and divinely by faith in Christ, whose justifying deed is made universal and applicable to all by the Spirit.

The Christian philosophy of history is in curious harmony with modern science. Man first appears on a natural, or physical plane ; he has intimations of a higher life which he cannot realise. At length in Christ a new plane is reached, and a new order begins. As the flower unfolds from the bud, a new thing, the spiritual life unfolds from the physical. As man, a higher type of being, may be presumed to have been evolved from lower and imperfect beings, so from man himself evolves, through Christ, a new creation. If man appears the consummate flower of the travail-ling Creation, the sons of God, becoming sons by union with the Son of God, are the flower of humanity. The whole scheme of things is seen evolving, and reaching the higher plane. The creation is in travail for the sons of God.

But a difficulty suggests itself. Going back to the

idea that righteousness is the product of faith alone, a shallow view of faith may lay the doctrine open to the charge of encouraging sin. A man believes that he is justified by faith, apart from anything he has done or can do. The grace of God is magnified by forgiving him. May he not continue to sin, and to be forgiven? May he not think that Grace will be even more magnified by these fresh demands on it?

The question is raised, only to be swept aside by showing what faith actually is. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus is a new principle. The soul by faith in Christ is disconnected from the law of sin and death, and united with the working power of goodness. It passes out of the realm of the Law and Sin, into another realm, where divine powers of goodness enter into the soul. The fact may be illustrated by marriage; the soul is a bride who was married to the law of Sin and Death; that husband is dead, and now she is married to the new power of holiness and life—Christ. Thus "faith in Christ" is very different from an easy-going belief. That sin is forgiven, and does not much matter, such a belief might, and does, lead to continuance in sin; but "faith in Christ" is a spiritual union with Christ who is sinless, and that excludes sin.

Then Paul, by a curious glimpse into his own spiritual history, shows how the life of victory is achieved often by a prolonged and desperate conflict. The old life struggles with the new. The old life, which he calls for convenience' sake the "flesh," wars with the new, which he calls the Spirit. It is a humiliating conflict

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for a man. He intends good, but does evil. The higher principle decrees ; the lower principle thwarts the execution of the decree.

The victory only comes as a gift of Christ ; the new life, flowing from Christ, vanquishes the power, and the law, of evil. The sense of this divinely-given victory leads to that magnificent outburst of gratitude and joy, with which ch. viii. ends.

Then he returns to his philosophy of history, and tries to explain the position of his own people Israel, the chosen race to which he belongs. His survey of the past enables him to forecast the future. Israel was always a rebellious people, but in it there was a "remnant," a germ of goodness and obedience. To that ideal Israel, hidden in the gross body of the reality, the promise came. Then again he sees that even in the literature of Israel, it was always contemplated that the promise should be to mankind ; and not Israel after the flesh, but an ideal and spiritual Israel gathered out of all races and nations should be the people of God.

Scripture is quoted to prove this point with a marvellous fullness and felicity. The divine purpose was that all men should be incorporated in the Israel of God by faith, and therefore Israel itself must make its connection with God effective by that same principle.

Then the patriot speaks. He looks at his own race, Israel, to which he belonged, of which he was proud, and for which he would die. He shows their "righteousness," laborious and conscientious, but

ineffective ; this mistaken righteousness, to which they attach so much importance is their main hindrance to realising and submitting to the righteousness which is of God by faith.

Yet Israel will some day believe. They are cast out for a moment, like the bough of a fruit-tree lopped, that the stock of the Gentiles may be grafted in. But in time they will be grafted in themselves.

The realisation that Israel, his own people, shall some day be saved leads to another exclamation of wonder and gratitude at the riches of God's wisdom and knowledge. "How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past tracing out ! For, who hath known the mind of the Lord ? or who hath been his counsellor ? or, who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again ? For of him, and through him, and unto him are all things. To him be the glory for ever. Amen." (xi. 33-36).

The dogmatic exposition finished, the discourse moves on to the precepts of life and conduct which logically results from "faith in Christ." Indeed, that faith produces of itself a certain character, first a transformation, an assimilation to the will of God ; then a complete humility. Saved by grace, a man finds no place for boasting ; then the searching principle of mutual service, each individual being a member—one might say to-day a "cell"—in the body of Christ ; then peace and gentleness towards the world ; then good citizenship ; then the honourable payment of debts, the only debt, always paid but never discharged, being



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mutual love, love which is, without thinking of it, the complete fulfilment of the Law.

Then comes the passage which stirred the slumbering, uneasy soul of Augustine, the call to put on the armour of light, to put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then out of the love abounding flows consideration for weaker brothers ; whatever might offend them, however legitimate in itself, is to be surrendered. Thus the faith in Christ produces the new community of love and toleration, in which distinctions of Jew and Gentile disappear, and " the God of hope will fill us with all joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Lastly, there is the personal element. Read it, ch. xv. 14-32. Note the spirit even in the ordinary dealings of life which results from the faith in Christ. He wishes to see those Christians in Rome, on his way to Spain—for his eyes turn towards the Pillars of Hercules, the boundary of the West. But first he is going up to Jerusalem with the offerings which have been collected in Macedonia and Achaia for the poverty-stricken Christian community there. And there is a foreboding in his mind that the Jews may attack him, and that he may arrive in Rome, not as an apostle, but as a prisoner ; which actually came to pass. He asks, therefore, for their prayers. Finally (passing on to ch. xvi. 21) he gives the greetings of his companions and kinsmen who were with him as he wrote in Corinth (apparently). The amanuensis adds a word of his own, for this extraordinary treatise was thrown off at white



heat, dictated to Tertius, in the midst of unremitting missionary labours.

A concluding doxology is like a tuneful echo of all that has been said, gathering up the theology, the philosophy of history, the practical religion, which have been pulsing and gleaming through the preceding pages. The revelation of God in Christ, coming in its due time, the new principle of faith in Christ as the final religion for all nations, the practical power of God to keep all who believe, find a harmonious expression.

“To Him who is able to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preached fact of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which had been sealed in times eternal, but is now manifested, and, through prophetic scriptures, according to the ordinance of the eternal God, unto obedience of faith, made known unto all the nations, to the only wise God through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory for ever and ever, amen.”

On this high plane, where the Only God is manifested through Jesus Christ, and the mystery of the gospel is taking wing to fly over all the world, from Rome its secular capital, the letter closes.



VII

AN EXCERPT FROM A LETTER TO EPHESUS

(Rom. xvi. 1-20.)



## CHAPTER VII

### AN EXCERPT FROM A LETTER TO EPHESUS

(Rom. xvi. 1-20.)

THIS is part, or possibly the whole, of a commendatory note which Paul sent with Phœbe from Corinth to Ephesus, where Paul had laboured for three years. It is inserted in the letter to the Romans, probably because the two, the longer and more important, and the shorter and insignificant, were despatched from Corinth at the same time. We are grateful that the importance of the larger epistle has preserved this satellite which was drawn into its orbit, and that it has come down to us.

While it is regarded as part of the epistle to Rome it is very perplexing. How could Paul know so many people personally in the city which he had not seen? And how could Aquila and Priscilla, who before (Acts xviii. 24-28) and after (ii. Tim. iv. 19) were in Ephesus, be just then in Rome? Besides the persons named, so far as we can trace them, are connected with Ephesus.

By good fortune, therefore, we possess this little note of Paul's which, though it contains nothing of doctrinal value, gives us a very valuable glimpse into

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the spirit and methods of those who first believed in Christ. He is only introducing a deaconess of the church at Cenchreæ. Phœbe had helped him and many more besides. He is glad to commend her to the consideration and care of his friends at Ephesus. But merely to remember those friends calls up so many persons and faces whom he knows and loves, that the note swells into a list of twenty-six men and women, including in some cases their households, who are particularized and remembered, as they are cared for and loved.

This is one secret of Paul's enormous power; he individualised, he entered into personal lives, he remembered what each was, what each had done. The mind that could take great ranges of thought and doctrine, and synthesise separated facts, had also the gift which commonly is found only in quite a different type of mind, the personal touch, which makes a man lovable.

The note ends with a warning against persons who were creating dissentience and hindrances. But his recognition of the faithful is of more value than his condemnation of the bad. His heart yearns over the Ephesian Church; he longs to have them all expert in good and guileless in evil. He has the triumphant conviction that God will soon trample Satan down under their feet.

But these particular messages to individuals remembered by name would probably have more immediate effect than the amplest statement of dogmatic truth.

## An Excerpt from a Letter to Ephesus 107

General exhortations and praises pass over us, but when our name is mentioned the least word goes home. We all like to be remembered; it always appeals to us; even though nothing special is said about us, if our name occurs in a letter our attention is aroused. We feel singled out, recognised, encouraged.

The art of knowing people personally and by name is one of the ways by which a gospel is preached and a church is built up.

Glance at this list of names, and the *nuances* of the salutation, not as an antiquarian study in the life of Paul, but as a suggestion of what we should be and do in the Christian church to-day.

A study of the passage teaches its own lesson; no application is needed. We are impelled to imitate the man who is himself the imitator of Christ.

First comes the church in the house of Prisca and Aquila, that church which is mentioned in 1 Cor. xvi. 19. A "church" was a community of living souls, not too large to assemble and worship in a private house. Prisca is put first, she may have been the leading spirit; the name suggests a noble Roman family. But wife and husband had run the risk of their lives for Paul, perhaps in the *émeute* which drove him out of Ephesus; all the churches of the Gentiles were indebted to them. They were fellow-workers in their craft, as tent-makers (Acts xviii. 2-3), but they were fellow-workers also in Christ Jesus. Aquila was of Jewish origin and came from Pontus. The two had been driven out of Rome by persecution, and were very dear to Paul.

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Then Epænetus is mentioned. His name means "Praised," and to Paul he is memorable and beloved, as the first convert in Ephesus, and so the first in the Roman Province of Asia. Then comes a woman, Mary, about whom it is only said that she laboured actively for the Christians at Ephesus.

Andronicus and Tunias have three honourable distinctions; they were in Christ before Paul himself; they were related to Paul; and they had shared imprisonment with him. They are distinguished among the apostles.

Ampliatius is described like John the beloved disciple; not what he did but what he was, held him in the heart of Paul: "My beloved in the Lord." Urbanus was like Prisca and Aquila, a fellow-worker; Stachys was also "beloved." . . . Apelles was "approved in Christ," a better title to eternal fame than to be the great painter after whom he was named. Then come a *familia* of slaves and freedmen, of the household of Aristobulus; the slaves, if not their master, were Christians. Herodion was another kinsman of Paul's. Then follows another *familia*, of Narcissus. Two women are then mentioned, Tryphœna and Tryphosa, because they "laboured in the Lord"; then another, Persis, a beloved woman, who "laboured actively in the Lord." Then Rufus, who was "chosen of the Lord"—was he the son of Simon of Cyrene who had borne the cross for Jesus? The name was too common to establish the connection with Mark xv. 21, but his mother had been like a mother to Paul.



## An Excerpt from a Letter to Ephesus 109

Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas and Hermas are mentioned with another group of brethren, who probably formed a congregation in Ephesus. Apparently, also, Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, with other saints, formed a third congregation.

As he greets them all and sends them the greetings of all the churches of Christ with which he was in contact, he would have them to greet one another. The kiss was the equivalent of our hearty handshake. A handshake can be holy as a kiss. In our colder salutations we should take care that the warmth of heart should not be less.

Perhaps we instinctively draw from this brief survey the inference that this number and variety of personal relations with others are a sign and a means of Christian life. The remarkable feature is that Paul, with his manifold responsibilities and engagements, ever pressing forward in the breathless extension of the gospel to the ends of the earth should retain this particularity of personal reminiscence. If ever a man might be excused from charging his memory with details, it would be one who has a world-mission, and (except in times of imprisonment) is always on the move. But he sets us a fine example of a work which never forgets details, though it never loses itself in them.

If we would be Christians of the Apostolic order, we must take a close and wide personal interest in individuals. We must love them and recognise them, and be quick to recall their good points.

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There is no other way of doing permanent good. It is a great gift to address multitudes; it is also a gift to formulate and advocate the truths and dogmas of religion. The preacher and theologian have their proper places in the Christian church, but the effective workers are those who have this greatest gift of individualising. If they preach they always seem to be addressing each one present. Each one thinks that the preacher knows his peculiar case. If they think, and formulate the truths of religion, they never wander off into unfruitful abstractions. They keep in touch with men, and in that way the truth they advocate reaches and affects men.

We are tempted to excuse ourselves from personal service on the ground that it is not our work. We are ready to write, to preach, to lecture, to teach, but to visit from house to house, to remember the children in the family, to speak to people by the way, to draw individuals to Christ by a warm personal sympathy with them, these tasks we remit to others who have the gift.

It is, therefore, a wholesome lesson for us to see Paul who composed the Epistle to the Romans, who by sheer brain-power thought out the bearings of the Christian verities, and surveyed the whole course of man's spiritual history, keeping up these close personal relations with the people whom he met in all the churches which he formed, writing, we may surmise, hundreds of letters (which have perished) to one and another, for the most homely purposes, letters of

## An Excerpt from a Letter to Ephesus III

commendation, letters of encouragement, comfort, counsel or rebuke, mere letters of affection and esteem.

Christianity produces this type of character, this overflowing and particularising love, this swiftness to see that mankind is made up of individuals, and that, therefore, you can only touch mankind by touching them individually.

The higher criticism, therefore, which separates this note from the letter, leads us to a spiritual truth, of which we at all times require to be reminded.



VIII  
COLOSSIANS  
A.D. 62 (?)



## CHAPTER VIII

COLOSSIANS

A.D. 62 (?)

It is not possible to determine the date of this letter, nor is it necessary. We assume that Paul has reached Rome, and has been kept in prison there, as described in the Acts of the Apostles.

Deissmann's\* advocacy of the view that Paul had passed a time in prison at Ephesus, and that from that imprisonment he wrote to the not very distant churches of Colosse and Laodicea, and that these are our two kindred epistles of *Colossians* and *Ephesians*, demands attention because of the distinction of the advocate. But the peculiar style and quality of these two letters point to a development of the writer's thought and theology, and we instinctively carry them down to the latest period of his life.

The imprisonment as we see from Acts was not severe. His friends were in touch with him, and with Aristarchus his fellow-prisoner. He mentions Mark, and Jesus, called Justus, and Luke, and Demas. A minister of the Church at Colosse, Epaphras by name, had come to him, telling him of the spiritual devotion

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\* Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*. 229.

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of the church there, and also of the spiritual perils to which it was exposed. Prisoner as he was, and though he had never been at Colosse, he was moved by the Spirit to write, perhaps recognising that the perils in that church would beset the Church of Christ always, as, indeed, has proved to be the case. Thus, brief as the letter is, it is invaluable for all time ; it raises and deals with the interior truths of the Christian religion, and opens up the completed view of Christ. An occasional letter, with a universal significance, that is the divine characteristic of Paul's correspondence.

The letter was carried from Rome by his friend Tychicus, who was accompanied by Onesimus, the escaped slave of a Colossian Christian, Philemon. Paul wished it to be read in the neighbouring churches, Hierapolis, etc., and especially in Laodicea, the wealthy and lukewarm church, which is to us so familiar.

The letter is singularly real. There is a message to Nymphas, who had a church in *her* house ; in each city there were evidently several congregations, though one church.

It is not an abstract treatise, but a genuine letter. True, it soars to the height of heaven, but it also has its feet firm on the solid earth. Yes, it *soars*. Only nine years had passed since *Thessalonians* was written, but what a conception, what a grasp of the reality and significance of Christ, has been attained in the full experience of those years ! And now in the enforced retirement of a prison, Christ, full-orbed, comes into his ken. In *Philippians*, written two years



later, a few more touches are added ; but this Epistle reaches the zenith. Here we have the most majestic and commanding view of the person of Christ that has been revealed to the Church. No council, no later theology, has added anything to it. It might even be maintained that the attempts to define and to safeguard the doctrine of the person of Christ have been by no means an unmixed gain. The main value of the heresies of Nestorius, Eutyches, Apollinaris, and of the tiresome discussion of Monophysites and Monothelites, and even of the final decisions of Chalcedon and Constantinople, is, that they throw us back with increased wonder and gratitude on the conception of the first apostles. To get the right conception of Christ, who He was, and what He was, we have to push past the Christologies and see with open eyes what was revealed to Paul in prison.

We must try to grasp this extraordinary fact, that within a generation after the crucifixion, and in the mind of one who was a contemporary of Jesus, this vast, inclusive idea of Christ, cosmological, as well as theological and anthropological, is complete.

The full doctrine of the Person of Christ was not the growth of centuries, but the gift given to the world in the original fact of Christ.

Now, before we try to obtain a view of the majestic person of Christ, as Paul saw Him, we should spend a moment in realising the error which elicited this magnificent demonstration of truth. Already in these Asian churches that unbridled speculation had begun

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which afterwards took shape in the various systems of gnosticism. It was what we to-day call Theosophy. Paul used the wider term, Philosophy. This kind of speculation was to the Ionian mind much more attractive than the religious interest. Without denying the Christian verities it would wrap them up in such a gossamer of fine-spun theories, that their religious force would be weakened and neutralised. Into this speculation entered Jewish and Phrygian elements, which we hardly have the material for distinguishing and disentangling. The ascetic practices which the Essenes had made familiar in Judaism, and the mysteries which Phrygia had imported into Greek religion, were wrought into a curious syncretism. The spiritual world was filled up, and mapped out with grades of intermediate beings between God and man. Astral bodies, and mahatmas, and the other figments of modern Theosophy were all anticipated. Christians were to seek initiation into this fictitious world by means of ascetic practices, voluntary fasts, the observance of certain days, the keeping of prescribed regulations. Theosophy and Gymnosophy went together. The body was to be subdued, that the spirit might enter into relation with the spiritual powers. The conflict was between body and spirit, instead of between good and evil. The dualism, which was afterwards called Manicheism, after Mani, was offered as the basis of religious thought and practice.

Here was the heresy which roused Paul to state the fulness and perfectness of Christ, a fictitious construction

of the spiritual world, the mode of entering it by mysteries and mortification of the flesh, the denial of matter and of the reality and legitimacy of the bodily life, in the interests of a spurious spirituality.

In a sorrowful sense the epistle failed of its immediate object. If it had been understood, the vast structure of Medieval asceticism, against the beginning of which it was a protest, could never have risen. (If it were understood to-day, the mushroom systems initiated by unbalanced women, which are competing with Christianity, would not mislead their thousands and tens of thousands.)

The epistle is hard reading. The eagerness of the writer's spirit sets grammatical construction at defiance ; ideas succeed one another in breathless haste. Writing in prison is not easy, and the presence of exuberant heresies forbids calm reflection and lucid exposition.

But if the Epistle had been understood, or even effectively known, during these Christian ages, many delusions and heresies would have been forestalled.

The central idea, which keeps our feet firm in the rush of thoughts and the confusing swirl of details, is this : *That intermediate space between God and man, vast as it is, unsearchable and untractable as it is, is yet filled up completely by Christ.*

Gnostics before and since have filled it with hierarchies of spirits, æons, saints, demons, mahatmas. Paul fills it with Christ, and Christ alone. The whole Creation is viewed as the outcome of Christ. He was

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before all things ; in Him, for Him, by Him all things came into existence and cohere. God issued forth to construct a universe in and through Christ, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden (ii. 3), the wisdom that devised, and the knowledge that understands, the world.

Out of His centrality in the universe He came into humanity. He was the likeness of the invisible God. In Him dwelt the fulness of Deity, so far as it could be expressed bodily (ii. 9). God is necessarily invisible, though the heart of man demands and desires Him ; it is not possible that He in His fulness should appear in a body that can be seen and handled. But Christ came in such a body and was seen by human eyes. When we saw Him, we were looking on the likeness of God.

His coming gathered about him those who believed ; they were brought into relation with him, not by ascetic practices, which, plausible as they seem, have no spiritual power in them, but by faith ; and the body formed by those who believe is the Church. As Christ is the fulness of God, the Church, his body, is the visible fulness of Christ, who fills all in all. Those who form his Church die with him, are buried with him, in baptism, rise with him into a new life, live with him in the heavenly and spiritual world, their life hidden with him in God. Thus the blood of the Cross has a cosmic significance.

In the midst of the world of men is this fulness of God, a Body, of which Christ is the head, a closely

articulated body of those who by believing are forgiven, cleansed, reconciled, ransomed, the members, and limbs, and organs, of the now invisible Head.

But this being so, what or whom can we want but Christ? Christ is not merely Jesus of Nazareth, but the first-born of Creation, the being through whom all creation comes into being; he, the being that brought the world into being, enters into humanity, and redeems it. The Church is the thought of God returning to God by way of redemption. In Christ is the fulness of Deity, yet we can be in him completely by faith. Christ in us is the hope of glory. Christ living in us is the power of the renewed life.

The universe is thus unified, and humanity finds its true place in it. Christ unifies it. Christ brings humanity into its true place. And this he does, not through intermediate agencies, but directly and immediately. He brings each to God, and unites all in himself.

What or whom but Christ, then, can the poor creature, humanity, need? We ask, what need is there, but we might say, what room is there, for any other? He fills the whole space, all the grades. The hierarchy is not wanted. Nay, it is impertinent and out of place. (There is God in Christ, in Christ is man. None is needed to bring the soul to Christ, and brought to Christ it is brought to God.)

It seems humility to come to intermediate beings, to ask saints and the "Mother of God" to intercede with Christ for us; it is not, however, humility, but

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unbelief; it implies that we are missing the whole significance of Christ, in whom we are complete.

The mortification of the flesh, and the ascetic practices and observances seem religious, and win the admiration of men; but they dishonour Christ. Faith in Him alone accomplishes all that these methods are aiming at. Indeed, these methods do not accomplish the object which faith accomplishes. They leave the "flesh," in the spiritual sense of that term, unsubdued. They provoke vices, instead of conquering them. The ascetic rapture fills the atmosphere with the alluring spirits of evil. But faith in Christ is victory and deliverance.

Faith in Christ is the crucifixion of the sensual nature on his cross. Impurity, appetite, evil desire, even the idolatry of covetousness, all that is called spiritually "the body of the flesh," is put off when real faith in Christ comes, and what is called spiritually "the body of Christ" is put on.

Faith in Christ brings humanity together in one purified and holy body. If all men believed in him they would become one, members one of another, liberated from self and the life of the senses and sin—they would live on a new plane. Just so far as this new humanity comes into existence the life of the upper world is manifested, the possibilities of an infinite future are disclosed. A new life flows in the world. In the name of Jesus thanksgiving arises to the Father, which can only express itself in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

3 This new life makes, or re-makes, the family. Husbands and wives, parents and children, are able to  
4 treat each other as they should. It is capable of making a regenerated economic society, and of setting up the right relation between masters and slaves. No evil, corruption, cruelty, oppression, injustice, can resist this flow of divine life, which comes through Christ the head to his body.

As Christ is the maker of the world, the body of Christ is the regeneration of humanity. We cannot too emphatically mark out this simple truth, that the genuine Christian life is the solution of all the problems that perplex us; if all would live it, our problems would disappear.

Here is the keynote of the Christian life: "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as unto the Lord, and not unto men; ye serve the Lord Christ."

A correspondent says: "I am engaged in business from early morning till late at night. Even if I want to write a letter to cheer a Christian I have to take it out of my night's rest. I often think I would like more time for active work for Jesus. But what does this passage say? It calls me a slave; well, I am almost a slave; but in my daily life I am God's slave, not my master's, and because of this I shall receive the recompense of the inheritance, not for writing and cheering Christian friends, or other direct work for Jesus, but for simply doing my daily duties. How I wish I were a preacher to tell out to all overworked Christians like myself the blessing I found from this verse."



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(If all would live the Christian life! If we were all knit together in the faith of Christ, as Paul describes it here; if we could treat each other as members of the body of Christ, and draw our life and power from the head, we should see that regenerated society for which our age is longing.)

The mere dream of it has awakened in Christendom the hope of a genuinely human society, a nation of brothers, and a brotherhood of nations. Our failures and hypocrisies have alienated the overborne and restless spirits of the time from the truth which produced the dream. But the truth which produced can alone realise it. Only such a spiritual philosophy as this epistle sketches, presenting a world that issues out of a thought of God and is realised by a word of God, and claiming man as the proper vehicle of that spiritual thought and word, is ever likely to regenerate the world. Without such a philosophy, our struggles for reform are the restless movements of the blind, the halt and the lame, not prophecies, but delusions.



IX

PHILEMON

THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY

A.D. 62 (?)



## CHAPTER IX

### PHILEMON

THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY      A.D. 62 (?)

WITH the letter to Colosse was despatched a private letter to a Christian in the city, named Philemon. The letter, it has been said by Sabatier, is an admirable illustration of a text in that public letter: "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how to answer each one" (Col. iv. 6).

We have here only a few lines, but they are so full of grace, so pungent, so significant, so rich in consequences, that we may describe the letter as a pearl of the most exquisite purity in the treasure of the New Testament.

In the fourth century, when the Church was heated with controversies concerning the person of Christ, the letter was widely rejected as unworthy of an apostle, because it contained no doctrinal matter. For that reason it escaped the irreverent hand of Marcion. This judgment shows how grateful we ought to be that the slight piece survived, probably because it was tacked on to the letter to the Colossians. For modern critics judge very differently of its value.

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What to the fourth century seemed all important, to the twentieth seems secondary; what to the fourth seemed trivial, to our own century seems vital.

Bengel says: "The single epistle of Philemon very far surpasses all the wisdom of the world." Renan called it a true little *chef d'œuvre* of the art of letter-writing.

If it were the only surviving letter of the apostle's it would give us a very attractive picture of his character. We should see what was implied in being a follower of Christ, whose name gleams in almost every sentence of the letter. Here, we should say, was one who spent his life in travailing for the souls of others, that they might be found in Christ; one who regarded no distinctions of rank or station, but felt every human being to be a precious possession to be claimed for Christ. If the letter stood alone, we should quote it as an admirable example of courtesy and tact; and we should be thankful for the light it sheds on the institution of slavery.

It illustrates the method by which the Christian religion attacks social evils; not denouncing, nor rooting up, but undermining, working from within, touching and changing hearts, so that old abuses are shed and thrown off by the push of a new inner life.

Brief, therefore, as the letter is, it opens up vistas of possibility. The facts and contents can be stated in a sentence or two, but they start us on a long and eventful journey, the end of which the world does not yet see.

Philemon of Colosse was a convert of Paul's, and had been a fellow-worker with him. Most likely he had heard the apostle in Ephesus, and had gone back to his own city to preach and teach and lead the Church. His wife, Apphia, was a Christian; and Archippus, who seems to have been his son, was a minister of the Church in Colosse or in Laodicea. Philemon's house in Colosse was the home of a church assembly, and he himself was singular for love and faith toward Christ and toward his fellow Christians.

It is hard for us to realise that such a man should have slaves. But we must remember that up to the eighteenth century so devoted an apostle as George Whitefield still bought and sold men; the power which was to emancipate slaves and make slavery impossible was in the world, but worked very gradually. A slave of Philemon's, named Onesimus (which means Useful), had run away, taking with him things which belonged to his master, and had found his way to Rome, that cesspool, as Sallust called it, to which all the refuse and abomination of the Roman empire naturally gravitated. Here he had been brought, probably by the Colossian Epaphras, into contact with Paul the prisoner, and through the word of Paul he had been born again by faith in Jesus Christ. As a spiritual son, born in his bonds, Paul would have liked to keep him near to him. But he sent him back to his master, as lawful property for which his master had paid. Paul offered to repay himself what the slave had stolen when he ran away.

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With great delicacy he reminds his correspondent what he owed to him—his own soul—and hints that he might claim the pardon of Onesimus as a return for that higher spiritual service. But he wants Philemon to grant the boon as a free gift, not as the payment of a debt to his father in Christ. He asks him therefore to receive Onesimus back, as “Useful” indeed, not as a slave any longer, but as a brother beloved, both in the affairs of this life and in the higher communion of Christ’s people. “Yes, brother,” he adds, “let me have use of you (ὀναίμην); be my Onesimus, comfort my heart in Christ. Give me hospitality when I come to you. And may the grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all.”

We cannot help sharing Paul’s confidence that Philemon would grant his request; but we have no further information. This flash of light falls on the apostle’s character, and on his relations with his converts; and even for so brief a glimpse we are grateful.

In this little episode we do not know whether to admire more the love for Onesimus the slave or the consideration for Philemon the master. The triumph of grace is to combine the two. For that is one of the greatest difficulties in life, to see two parties bitterly opposed to one another and yet so to appreciate both as to bring them together in a mutual understanding. It is one of the results of being in Christ, that this power comes to birth; for in Christ is neither bond nor free.

But as a purely human judgment we should probably say that the love for a slave at all, and especially a Phrygian slave, was the surest sign of a new power at work in the world. We have in the modern world almost lost all the data which would enable us to understand the slavery of antiquity. The profoundest philosopher and the most sensitive moralist regarded the slave as something less than human. Aristotle, who through Scholasticism became practically a doctor of the Mediæval Church, seriously taught that friendship (the word used is one constantly translated "love" in the New Testament) was not possible with a slave, *quâ* slave, any more than with lifeless things, as with a horse or an ox. For the slave is a living implement, as the implement is a lifeless slave. With him, *quâ* slave, there could be no friendship, though there might be with him *quâ* man. The Roman was more brutal in his language and in his practice than the Greek. "Implements," says Varro, writing on agriculture, "are vocal, semi-vocal, or dumb; vocal slaves, semi-vocal oxen, dumb ploughs."

In the Græco-Roman world, in which Paul was living, slaves had no rights. It was not till the reign of Hadrian that the absolute power of life and death was taken away from owners. Almost at the moment that Paul wrote this letter about Onesimus an event was happening in Rome which sheds much light on slavery. Pedanius Secundus, a senator, was murdered by a slave of his household. The law condemned all the slaves of the household, four hundred in number,

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to execution. The populace rose in indignation, and the question was discussed in the Senate. But the ruthless sentence was carried out, on the ground that "it is not possible to keep down such a rabble except by fear."

A few years earlier (A.D. 47), when the practice of turning out sick slaves to die on the streets was on the increase, Claudius decreed—what? That the practice should be illegal? No one dared to propose this; but that any slave who survived this treatment should be emancipated. A slave, then, was a human being without any rights of a human being, a tool that happened to be a living thing.

Then Onesimus was a Phrygian, and in Rome the Phrygian slaves were the most contemptible of the contemptible class. A Phrygian slave, as the literature of the time shows, was the most servile, the most morally debased, the most ready instrument of vice. Such a man (hardly held to be a man) Paul had won to Christ, begotten him in a spiritual sense as a child of God. And now with warm personal regard he espouses his cause, and begs his master to treat him as a brother beloved.

A silent revolution had taken place: Christ had touched the lowest of humanity, and was able to bring the most abandoned and worthless into the family of God. In this letter, therefore, we hear the death-knell of slavery. The institution rested on a gross misreading of the nature of man. As man's true nature was revealed—man is potentially the child of God—slavery became an outrage, an intolerable abuse.



And yet the remarkable thing is that Paul says nothing about emancipation in the abstract. He is no doctrinaire. He is content to deal with the individual case ; he sees no reason for assailing directly the institution on which ancient society rested. He says no word of reproach to Philemon for owning slaves, and never disputes the proprietorship. Only Onesimus is now a Christian, and therefore a brother. Christianity was a seed in the world, which falls into the ground and develops gradually. Its method is not revolutionary. A principle is at work which convicts such an abuse as slavery of absurdity, as if a worm in the gourd had touched the centre of life ; and yet centuries would pass before the dead thing would disappear.

Christianity deals with vested interests and ancient abuses tenderly, as Paul deals with Philemon. It is no part of Christ's plan to attach exaggerated importance to economic conditions or to social custom. He sees in the slave-owner and in the slave merely human souls entrapped and submerged in the elements of the world. He would emancipate both, with respect for their personality and for their prejudice. Both are slaves until He makes them free ; when they are free they can adjust their mutual relation on the new principle.

But the letter leads us to an even deeper view of the way in which a Crucified Saviour works in the world for redemption and regeneration. Crucifixion was in Rome the peculiar punishment for slaves. "Do not

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threaten me," says the slave in Plautus, "I know that the cross will be my sepulchre ; there lie my ancestors—father, grandfather, great grandfather, great great grandfather." A slight offence might bring the cross. A Roman lady would find her slave girl neglecting a trivial matter in her toilet. In a fit of anger she would order her to be crucified ; and there was no appeal. If a slave was old and useless the master could be rid of him and his keep by the simple way of the cross.

That was the peculiar stigma of the cross : it was the punishment of slaves. To it was nailed the dehumanised human being, the tool that had become worthless, as a penalty for neglect, as a means of getting rid of what was no longer needed.

And Paul's Master had died on a cross. Paul was preaching that crucifixion as the way of pardon, peace, and eternal life. The cross was being transfigured from the vulgar gibbet for destroying the worthless into the symbol of Redemption for all mankind. The changed cross is what marks the miracle of Christianity. And because the cross was transformed, the slave also, whose natural end was the cross, became transformed. A slave was a brother, redeemed by Christ. For a slave, Paul, a Roman citizen, would plead, would become sponsor, would regard a favour done to him as done to *himself*.

This was the way in which Christ liberated slaves ; because of the Cross, this country eventually paid twenty millions to liberate the slaves in her colonies ; because of the Cross, Abraham Lincoln at length died

to liberate the slaves in America ; because of the Cross, Livingstone died at Ilala, seeking to staunch that open sore of the world, the African slave traffic.

Lowell, speaking of William Lloyd Garrison, the working printer who became the leader and apostle of emancipation in America, says :

“ O Truth, O Freedom, how are ye still born  
In the rude stable, in the manger nursed ;  
What humble hands unbar these gates of morn  
Through which the splendours of the new day burst ! ”

The liberation of all slaves begins in this letter to Philemon. Here a prisoner in a Roman prison, commending a runaway slave to his aggrieved master, “unbars the gates of morn,” though it has been long, so long, before the splendours of the new day have burst through.

And even yet the day is hardly more than dawning. But the principle of liberation is always at work. Slavery is mitigated rather than abolished. Indentured labour is milder slavery. And the vast mass of men—and still more women—in our own country are still in economic serfdom. They are at the mercy of a few who own them and exploit them, grant them the right to live only of grace, and refuse it to them on the first manifestation of independence. The People still are only beginning to turn restlessly in the house of bondage, and to breathe the word “liberty.” They have no clear right to live or to earn a living ; they cannot claim a rood of land on which to work ; their only claim is to so much land as to be buried in.)

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In the streets of the city, and under the pleasant hedgerows of England and Scotland, wander, helpless and homeless, the unmanned serfs of the modern world. They bow under their load; the lash that torments them is not less cruel because it is wielded by no visible hand.

The freedom hitherto gained for toiling humanity is negative rather than positive. But looking back on the slow progress of the past, and forward to, as we hope, the swifter progress of the future, we see this: The Cross, on which the Son of God died the slave's death for an enslaved world, is the inexhaustible potency of deliverance.

In Christ there is neither bond nor free. The liberty with which Christ has made us free is the gift of God, waiting until men have the intelligence to claim it.

The goal of humanity is Liberty. Men shall some day be free. Not slavery alone, but economic serfdom, shall be abolished. One great shaft of light shall lie across the land—the truth that all men and women are God's children, and He is their Father, living among them.

It has taken ages for men to learn the elementary lesson that they may not oppress, enslave, exact, tyrannise over their fellows. That lesson is almost learned now in Christendom. Slowly, though surely, it becomes plain wherever the cross is preached. But the further lesson is still to be learned, that in active brotherly love and mutual service—service even to the point of sacrifice and laying down of life, as Christ

laid down His life on the cross—is the proper human life for which we pant.

Certainly that spirit is in the air, and the world moves towards the realisation of that beautiful dream. When men have learnt to care for one another, when industry and commerce are realised, not as the means of gaining advantage over one another, or of exploiting one another, but as the closely-reticulated mutual service which makes a solidarity, a harmonious corporate life of all mankind, they will look back and see in this little letter the germ and the divine promise of their ultimate emancipation.



X

EPHESIANS





## CHAPTER X

### EPHESIANS

THE words "at Ephesus" in ch. i. 1. are omitted in the most ancient authorities. The letter could not have been addressed to the Ephesian Church as such ; for there Paul had spent three years of strenuous toil, and we can fancy what a crowd of personal messages there would have been, if he had been writing to them expressly. But it seems quite possible that when he wrote to Colosse and to Philemon, he sent by the same carrier a general letter to all the Churches in Asia Minor, ordering it to be copied, and the blank space "to the saints which are at——" to be filled in for each Church. If this was done we may suppose that the copy which reached Ephesus was the one which was incorporated in the collection of Paul's letters to form the nucleus of a New Testament Canon.

At first it looks merely like an expansion of *Colossians* ; many phrases and subjects are common to the two pieces. The most obvious difference, accounted for by the supposition just suggested, is the absence of personal references, and references to local dangers or errors. But these resemblances would be sufficiently explained if this letter were written at the same time as the one to Colosse. The main drift of *Ephesians* is quite

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different, and the truth presented in it is not found elsewhere. The "prisoner in the Lord," has in his confinement obtained a vision which is more palpably a revelation than any of his other occasional writings. Shut away from earthly things, he soars in spirit above all local circumstances and earthly conditions. Like the seer in Patmos, he sees the vision of the Church, not the local churches which he had founded, the care of which was such a daily burden, but the Church of all time and all places, that articulated spiritual organism, of which Christ was the Head.

The writer seems to be on his knees all the time, in rapt contemplation of the "mystery" which was being revealed to him—the long purposes of God, the slow unfolding of an eternal plan in the history of humanity. He speaks in a voice clear and mellow from behind the hills of God. What he says is addressed to the "believers in Christ Jesus," but the mysterious beauty of this work is likely to make unbelievers believe.

Here is for the first time the vision of *The Church*, the Church as a spiritual creation, "glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, holy and without blemish." The concrete churches of experience, as all the epistles show, were far removed from such holiness and perfection. Torn asunder by heresies, and defiled by vices, contentious, self-seeking and earthly, the churches, in apostolic days and ever since, have been the subject of the world's derision, and in their better moments the victims of their own agonising

contrition. But behind, beyond, above, and under, these poor, imperfect manifestations, the Church exists, holy, like a chaste bride, beautiful and spotless.

The framework of this Church, as it appears to the prisoner's eyes, is very compact and simple. There is Christ, the unity of humanity, Christ, the union of heaven and earth. By grace men and women have been redeemed and forgiven, through his blood, (that is to say, by his sacrifice of himself upon the Cross. They were dead in trespasses and sins, but they have been raised to spiritual life, and live with him in "the heavenlies." "You," he says, addressing not a handful in Ephesus, but a multitude whom no man can number, "you, in all places and times, who have thus been quickened, and united together in him, are the Church, his Body, "fulness of him who is filling all in all." Gentiles, yes, here is the mystery now revealed, you, no less than Jews, are brought into this body. The wall of partition which divided you from the Jews—every wall of partition which divides men from one another—is broken down by Christ. You are all Jews in a spiritual sense; the chosen race is the human race; the people of God are the People.

The spiritual Body of Christ now supersedes the merely temporary and visible community of Israel, the elect nation.

This was the fixed purpose of God from before all ages, to make one, one body of humanity, one richly articulated and endowed society, of which Christ is the Head. For this the world was formed through

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æons of geologic time. For this life pushed forward in its development, until it formed man; for this, since man was formed, the slow ages of his progress, his civilisation, his moral growth, his religious culture, have been unrolled.

Paul's eager anxiety is that his readers may have their eyes open to understand this vast thought, and may appreciate the Power which is fulfilling it. It is the same Power that raised Christ from the dead, the same Power that has raised them from spiritual death, the Power which shines upon them like the sun in his strength, and enables them to feel the thrilling love of Christ, which makes and knits together the spiritual Body, his Church, and brings it, corporately to the one God and Father of all, who is over all, and in all and through all.

When the Church is thus displayed in its transcendent beauty and divine authority, it becomes at once a powerful call to everyone to find and keep his true place in the mystic body, and then to walk worthily of the divine calling, humbly, gently and lovingly, each one doing his work, apostle, prophet, evangelist, or whatsoever he may be, so that the body may be knit together and built up, and manifested so far as may be in this concrete human life, in these imperfect earthly societies which represent the invisible reality.

Now you are amazed to see the cautions given against gross and glaring sins, dishonesty, sensuality and the rest. But this is true to the historic situation. Light had suddenly shone in Christ, revealing a new

standard of life, a new depth of morality. These people but yesterday had been walking in the darkness, or twilight, of a social and religious life which admitted the worst vices into its worship, and had become callous to the finer spiritual claims.

Light had shone, but men did not immediately see what practical results would follow in conduct from this illumination. A new Ethic had to grow out of the new religion.

But if warnings are given against very gross and elementary sins, if it is necessary to exhort converts not to steal, and not to indulge in licensed impurity, the teaching carries us to the ultimate heights of virtue. True, it is elementary, but it is also final. It sweeps the whole gamut of moral excellence. Let the reader carefully weigh the directions given in ch. iv. 17—vi. 9, and he will find that the ideal of conduct presented is such, that if only men would conform to it, human life would be completely blessed, heaven would have come down to earth. There is, over against man, as we know him, "the new man which is, after God, created in uprightness and holiness of truth" (ch. iv. 24. marg.) That new man, Christ, is to be put on, in place of the old man that is crucified.

Untruth goes, between man and man, for we are members one of another, there is one body. Stealing is inconceivable. Wrath, bitterness, illwill, die down in the infinite tenderness of divine forgiveness.

"All the blessed saints in heaven  
Are both forgiving and forgiven."

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Impurity, covetousness, and even silly talk, disappear, like dark creatures of the night, which vanish with the dawn.

The light has come : we must be children of the light, Awake from the sleep of sin, Christ shining upon us, we belong to the Dawn, we lead on the Day. Drunkenness is impossible, for the Holy Spirit is the source of joy, prompts the praises, psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, gives that sense of well being which in their ignorance men seek by physical stimulants. Joyful and triumphant, serving one another, we are in all relations of life to carry out the idea of the Body of Christ, and the mutual help which he would have us offer.

Wives and husbands must settle their married life on the principle of Christ's relation to the holy Church. Parents and children are drawn together in the new, redemptive tie. Masters and slaves, both slaves of Christ, become supplementary to one another, united, not by a cash nexus, but by Christ.

Thus unfolds before us the heavenly life on earth. The holy Church invisible seeks ever fresh modes of manifesting its divine life in the heart, the society, the whole life of humanity.

There floats above us the glorious Ideal, flashing in the light of heaven ; here on earth are the materials to be fashioned according to the pattern on the celestial mount. (A power is with us to realise the Ideal.) Even after defeat and failure the power renews its inspiration and its impulse. For the Ideal is not realised but by fierce conflict.

"No man attains self-mastery without  
Fierce self-renunciation ; and the fight,  
So hardly won, so perilous near to rout,  
Opens life's whole horizon on the sight."

That battle is presented in this vision of Paul in a most remarkable light. It is not only a struggle with certain inborn tendencies of our nature, like that described in *Rom.* vii. But there are "world princes of this present darkness" ranged against us, and ever "spiritual forces of evil in the Heavenlies."

It is a great aid to victory to realise the nature of the warfare, and the position of the enemy. Here the truth is laid bare. Why do we so rapidly deteriorate ? Why do truths quickly become dim, and noble motives suddenly lose their force ? Why do spiritual leaders and teachers often fall suddenly into sin, and expose the faith to scandal and reproach ? Why is the human heart suddenly chilled with doubt, so that the things which seemed most certain become unreal and questionable ? Why does a subtle iniquity creep into our most sacred things ? As Newman in a famous passage once said, the Church herself often becomes a kind of hideous and mocking travesty of the truth. A Pope will be a monster of iniquity ; priests will be like devils in holy garments ; monasteries and nunneries become nests of uncleanness. The sacred rites of religion are made to cover the foulest excesses. The words of Scripture are not only travestied, but made to support the very practices which Scripture condemns.

What is the reason of all this familiar downward tendency of things, of all this scandalous failure in



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religious persons and religious institutions? The answer is found in the dread fact, that our warfare is with powers of darkness and evil, which are not within us, but about us and above us. This gives the deep and solemn meaning to the struggle which is always going on in the world. Invisible forces of evil contend with invisible forces of light. And we, poor mortals, can resist the invisible forces of evil, only by the aid of the invisible forces of light. Woe betide us if we think that our conflict is only in our own bodies, or with human agents like ourselves; if we make that mistake we rely on the physical powers of resistance alone, we choose weapons which are simply of this world. The first hope of victory comes when we recognise the foe, and seek the appropriate armour of offence and defence.

The Church, though partly, is not wholly visible; the dominant forces are in the invisible and spiritual world. When we are allied with those forces, we, notwithstanding our apparent feebleness and helplessness, are able to overcome. We can stand, in the conflict, and when all is done we can be found standing, wounded and scarred, but victors.

There is a panoply of God, in which we can be clothed, which is described under the image of the armour which a Greek hoplite, or a Roman legionary, carried. The military simile gave extraordinary vividness and force to the spiritual conflict, when this was written, because the soldier and his accoutrements were before everyone's eyes.



With the powers of darkness in this world, and in the "heavenlies," ranged against you, you can, however weak, come off triumphant, if under all your armour you are girded with *Truth*, sincerity of purpose, fidelity to God, the truth of God, as revealed in Jesus Christ. That truth, in the twofold sense, subjective and objective, gives the feeble soul and makes it inwardly strong. Lie not; believe the truth; rely on truth alone; and the first condition of spiritual victory is there. The coat of mail to cover the body from all assaults is *Righteousness*, right conduct, obedience to the moral law, that is, to the will of God. And because that righteousness is just what, of ourselves, we lack, our breastplate must be the righteousness of Christ, reckoned to us, and wrought in us by the gospel (ch. vi. 14). That *Gospel of Peace* supplies also the military shoes, which enable the soldier to stand firm in the assault of the enemy, and to march securely; the sense of a gospel, and a gospel of peace, gives that security and confidence which are the secret of strength. The shield which can catch and quench the fiery darts of evil, is *Faith*, the unfaltering trust in Christ as the conqueror of sin, and the atoning principle which makes the soul at one with God. The helmet which protects the head is *Salvation*, the knowledge of forgiveness, and of reconciliation with God. When we know in whom we have believed, fear and misgiving vanish. Salvation is of God's making; no weapon forged can pierce it. The weapon for defence and offence is *God's Word*. Naturally we think of the

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Bible. But the most important part of the Bible, the New Testament, was yet in the making, when this letter was written. The term is more inward. It is not a word written, but a word spoken, the immediate communication of His commandments and of His teaching, which God makes to us through the Holy Ghost. It is this spiritual word which makes the written word live, interprets it, and distinguishes between the merely human element and the divine.

With this armour kept on, Truth, Righteousness, Peace, Faith, Salvation and the Word of God, continuing in constant and earnest prayer, you shall overcome. Grace is with all those whose love to our Lord Jesus Christ is love imperishable.

This epistle contains many words and ideas which have the stamp of originality, *e.g.* "the heavenlies," used five times (i. 3. 20, ii. 6, iii. 10, vi. 12) or "fulness" used three times (i. 23, iii. 19, iv. 13.) It seems constantly sensitive to expressions and conceptions which appeared later in Gnosticism and Theosophy. Not a few scholars think that it is too far removed from the language and circle of ideas which elsewhere are found as Paul's, to permit us to accept without doubt the statement that it came from him.

But let it be noticed that the vision of reality given in the letter gains nothing by coming from Paul, and would lose nothing if it came from another source. It offers an interpretation of the world, of life, of time, of the meaning of things, which commends itself by its breadth, its spiritual exaltation, its verifiableness,

to all who believe in Christ Jesus. It awakes within the soul a great longing : " Oh that I may be by faith incorporated in this glorious Body of Christ, and be filled with that Light, that Power, which can vanquish the darkness of the world and of death. O my soul, come into that company, with the one Lord, the one faith, the one baptism, the one God and Father of all. Live the life of love and purity. Battle manfully against the temptations and the sins. So shall that Kingdom come here ; so shall you presently hereafter enter into that Kingdom.

" My soul, there is a country,  
Far beyond the stars,  
Where stands a winged sentry,  
All skilful in the wars ! "

This heavenly passionate longing is the surest proof that the writing which creates it is inspired.

And no one can dwell on the " Epistle to the Ephesians " without feeling this intolerable craving for holiness and God.



XI

PHILIPPIANS

A.D. 63 (?)



## CHAPTER XI

PHILIPPIANS

A.D. 63 (?)

THIS has been called the "love-letter" of the Pauline Epistles. We may regard it also as his last will and testament. The Pastoral Epistles raise serious questions about their date, and though one of them seems to be a "last word," the bulk of the material, and all three must belong to the same time, points to the earlier years of the ministry. But where there is so much difficulty in fixing date and occasion, we do well to set the Pastorals apart, and to treat them on their own footing. In *Philippians* we get the last distinct and authenticated expression of Paul's mind, on the eve of the sacrifice of himself, which he, the "slave of Christ," made for the Christ whom he loved. It is a love-letter in the sense that it breathes a singular affection and devotion to the church at Philippi; and the interest of this lies for us in the fact that the city stood at the confluence of Asia and Europe, and Paul's love for Philippi seems like the love which he, Jew and Eastern as he was, felt for the Gentile and the West, in Christ.

We have no clue to the peculiar tenderness which he felt for this church; a church which, born into the

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world with the highest promise, lived without a history and perished without a memorial—except indeed that this imperishable letter, the love-letter of Paul, is the best and most lasting memorial that a church could have.

There were apparently no Jews in Philippi to harass and persecute their great countryman. The people were Romanised—it was a Roman *colonia*—and Paul, the Roman citizen, always felt at home with the Romans. An imperial spirit made him akin to the imperial race. There were many devoted women also among the converts, and the touch of tenderness in the letter is such as is drawn out by the thoughtfulness and care of devoted women. The church at Philippi had undertaken his material support, and quite recently had sent him in his imprisonment help by Epaphroditus. That, we may surmise, was the thought of Lydia, the maker of purple, who had been converted at Philippi. Women show their gratitude for spiritual help by material gifts, while men feel their spiritual benefactor sufficiently repaid by the joy of having helped *them*.

At any rate, whatever may have been the cause, in writing to Philippi the apostle becomes tender (read ch. i. 3-11). He unveils, as we only can to sympathetic hearts, his deepest feelings and his mature beliefs. Because they are receptive, and give him their affection, he is able to offer them the loftiest counsels, and the most inspiring ideals that occur in any of his letters.

This, then, is a human document of high value. It



shows us the Christian religion all aglow, in the depths of its spiritual foundation, and in the height of its heavenly glory. As the Gospels later on showed the life of God in the life of Jesus, this letter shows the life of Christ in the soul of Paul. Thus it sets before us in broad and simple outlines the life which Christians ought to live, the life which can be lived, for it was lived by this apostle. It presents a standard ; it constitutes a call.

The letter does not turn, as other letters do, on a doctrinal question ; nor does it follow a carefully marked out method. It is written, as we write letters, passing from subject to subject, in the ease and delight of free intercourse. The interest comes out, not so much by following the details, as by seeing the dominant thoughts which are implied in all that he says, such thoughts as the place that Christ holds in his heart, the conception which he has gained of Christ's redemptive work, the ideal of life which he sets before his correspondents and commends by his own experience and conduct.

Take that first point. If only you could come upon this letter afresh and read it for the first time, knowing nothing of Christianity, you would be positively staggered by the place which Jesus Christ occupies in this man's soul. And if in answer to the question, Who was Jesus? you were told that He was a contemporary of the writer, who had been crucified at Jerusalem, thirty-four years before, you would see at once that here was a fact that demanded close

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enquiry. Who was He, that could command so supreme and transcendent an emotion ?

“ For the sake of the surpassing knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord ! ” For that he would suffer or sacrifice everything. The thought that at that moment he might be enduring something for Christ turned the irksomeness and confinement and dismal apprehensions of a prison into joy. Day and night a guard, according to Roman custom, was fastened to him by a chain (ch. i. 13), but he used that repulsive proximity to preach Christ to the man, so that all the soldiers in the imperial guard had thus heard of Christ. What a providence that the prisoner was chained to the guard, until he could chain him to Christ by faith !

He was glad that his long, dreary, imprisonment was stirring all who believed in Rome to preach Christ more earnestly. And though some, the Judaising set, were preaching Him in their own way, and were not ill-pleased that the apostle to the Gentiles was shut up and silenced, yet that apostle was rejoicing that even in that way Christ was being preached.

Like Henry Martyn, that modern Paul, rejoicing when in testifying for Christ to Persian Moslems he was overwhelmed with obloquy, he would say :

“ If for thy sake upon my name  
Shame and reproach shall be,  
All hail reproach and welcome shame,  
Good Lord remember me.”

He sees Christ as a kind of All-sufficiency. He speaks of his “ riches in majesty.” Riches in majesty ! as if the King could supply all the needs of his subject,

He exults in Christ Jesus. His heart leaps with joy at the very mention of him. He can hardly write the name—and he writes it in almost every sentence—without ejaculating some new expression of gratitude and love. Life is for him simply Christ—to know him, to serve him, to promote his work in the world, that is his life—and such a life, even in a prison, is very good. It is lived in a sheltered haven, though the storms are breaking on the sea; “the peace of God which surpasses all conception guards the heart and mind in Christ Jesus.” He is content, therefore, to live and labour, even as a prisoner, and to serve his beloved people. He hopes, he thinks, he will be delivered from this imprisonment, and will return to Philippi, and make them glad: “that you may have abundant reason for exulting in Christ Jesus over my return to you.” But there is no doubt that, if he might choose for himself, he would rather die. Death for him would be gain; to depart and be with Christ is far better. A glory falls on the departure from this life; there is a sudden illumination of the Beyond. For the believer in Christ the “loosing,” as he calls it, the dissolution of the body, is better than the best life which the body offers.

The best life possible here is to have Christ with him; but that other life is to be “with Christ.” That is far better.

See what Christ is to this man, and such he can be to all who believe in him—everything for this life, the giver and perfecter of another life, the present pledge of an assured eternity.

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And this is that Jesus, Paul's own contemporary, who was crucified in Jerusalem, thirty-four years before !

Or take for a moment that second point, the clear conception that Paul has now attained of the act of redemption, Christ's supreme work. It had become so familiar, so habitual and underlying a truth in all his thinking, that it was not necessary, in a letter to intimates, to enforce or to expound it. There it was as the fruitful seed or root of all virtue and goodness. Out of it sprang humility ; it was the final lesson of that crowning grace. The act of redemption is the alphabet of all learning ; it is what the law of gravitation is in the physical order, it is what harmony is to the musician. It is the fundamental and dominating truth, which interprets all things and holds all things together.

The lyrical outbreak in ch. ii. is not to be used for establishing fine, wirespun conclusions in theology. It is the passion of the poet, rather than the logic of the thinker, which seeks and finds adequate language. It is a vision or a glimpse which sets the world of humanity in due relation to God, as the reasoning of astronomers has pieced together and interpreted the scattered points of light in the starry sky.

Christ was there, in the life and thought of God, from the beginning. He was there in " the form " of God. Now " form " (*μορφή*) is in Greek the inner and essential structure of an object, which establishes its individuality. In that essential being and unique

identity with God Christ was. But the prize he sets before him to seek and to gain, was not to claim this unique and characteristic equality with God. No, the prize he coveted was "equality with man." His yearning prompted a descent, a sacrifice, a casting aside, an emptying. See him descend, like a falling star out of heaven, and alight on the earth. What is he doing? He strips himself, he empties himself, to be born, to live on earth, to die. He cannot lay aside his Divine nature, but he lays aside all its privileges and powers, to become a man. He is found in fashion as a man, though in "form" he was and must be God. His humiliation goes lower than birth, down even to death; nay, lower still, the death of the Cross, the death of a slave, such a death as Paul himself, being a Roman citizen, could never suffer.

What a falling from Heaven! what a triumph of humiliation!

" From the throne of highest glory  
To the cross of deepest woe,  
All to ransom guilty captives!  
Flow my praise, for ever flow."

This act of redeeming love, the sacrifice of the highest for the lowest, has given him a name that is above every name. It is God's name in a new relation to humanity, a saving name. And to it every knee shall bow; that name every tongue shall confess.

God, from this manward, earthward side, has received a new glory, the highest glory. Creation is glorious, the making of life is more glorious; the human soul is glorious; the moral conflict is glorious. But the

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glory of redeeming love is greater than creation or life, than the human soul, or its moral victory. ( God in Christ emptying Himself to become man and to die on a cross, to save him from sin ; that, from our human standpoint, is the supreme Glory of God. )

Then mark the thought which throbs in this epistle, the ideal which he has for his friends, the ideal by which he himself has lived. Try to summarise this ideal of a Christian Life.

1 The first element in it is Love. He wishes them not only to love, but to excel in it. He cannot bear to hear of a difference between any of them. Euodia and Syntyche were not in perfect harmony ; he urges Synzygus (the name means yoke-fellow) to justify his name by bringing them together.

2 The second element is growth in knowledge and moral perception, and that growth unending. There is no final attaining here. He himself, though near the end of life, is still pressing on. He has no sense of having reached the highest platform. The only Christian perfection he knows is the condition of progress, the attitude of straining towards the heights, of pushing towards a goal, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

3 A third element is the constant occupation of the mind with the right thoughts. Demoralization begins in thought ; the mind wanders, is divided, entertains ideas which weaken and corrupt it. The Christian method of dealing with this danger is vigorously to exercise the mind on things of the opposite character,

on the true, the earnest, the just, the pure, the lovely, on courtesy, excellence, merit. He tries in a few words to bring out the range of right thinking.

The fourth element of this Christian ideal, is, that starting from a salvation which is given by God, we should work it out with fear and trembling, encouraged by the knowledge that God is working in us to will and to do of His good pleasure.

Lastly, the Christian life is to be free from anxiety, a life of constant rejoicing. It may be objected that human life is so uncertain, the forces with which we have to contend are so unmanageable, the calamities which befall us are so appalling, that it is impossible for us to be free from care. To this implied objection he answers by pointing to himself. And his situation was certainly as hard and trying as any in which we find ourselves. In prison, frustrated and hampered, approaching a trial which may bring death, ending a long series of hardships by one harder than all, he is perfectly content. In a severe school he has learnt the lesson. In straits and poverty he is as content as in comfort and sufficiency. Happiness rests on a basis quite free from all these accidental conditions. A power is with him which can easily master all circumstances, and therefore he is able for everything in Christ who strengthens him.

It is a very beautiful and convincing ideal thus presented to the imagination. It is a precept confirmed by an example. That such a life can be lived is shown by the fact that Paul was living it. It was tested in



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his case by the severest trials that can fall upon men, and it stood the test. There it is, a life in being, an ideal realised.

Love triumphant, constant growth in knowledge and moral perception of spiritual things, the mind constantly exercised on worthy and lofty subjects, serenity concerning the future, contentment in the present, an absolute conviction of a present supernatural Power sufficient for every event and every demand—that is the sketch of the genuine Christian life, as Paul has realised it in his later days.

By his practical example he seems to preach to his followers: "I have taught you a lofty Theology. I have shown you Christ in the heights, descending into the depths for your salvation, and what is the object of it all, except to make you good? My last will and testament to you is, Be good; be pure; be true; be patient; do not fret, or complain; do not fear; continue always to love."

But one is tempted to say with a sigh: "Is such a life possible for me? Can I live on that high plane, with an outlook clear towards Eternity, with a work to do, a life to live, blessing and saving the world, pouring out my life as a sacrifice, in the sacred service of faith? Can I be always rejoicing, in life and death, in loss and gain, in anguish and relief? Is that possible for *me*?"

The answer comes quite distinctly from Paul, and from the long line of Christian witnesses, who by Paul's faith in Christ, have lived and are living, who leave the trail of light behind them as they pass.



Yes, through the whole faith in the perfect Christ this life is possible for everyone. The life is lived in, rather than by, you. It is a supernatural life communicated by a vital contact with the unseen, indwelling, Christ.

This is the urge and push of Paul's letters from first to last. And as they form the earliest body of Christian literature, the first statement of the gospel, and the testimony to it, we do well to pause at this point for one moment, and to recognise that Christianity is, above everything, a practical life, the life of love and service and trust. It is made possible by the fact of the gospel, first by the statement of the fact, and then by the active and direct operation of the fact on mind and heart and conscience. But the object of the fact itself is to produce this goodness, this type of character which, being Christlike, is after the image of the invisible, eternal God.

It may be said, did not all religions, and all moral systems, say to men : " Be good ? " The answer is : possibly, but they could not know what goodness was, nor how to attain it. Christianity takes religion and philosophy in their ignorance and impotence, and urges the old precept " be good," with the clear light of what goodness is, and with the dynamic by which it is effected.



XII

I. PETER

A.D. 65 (?)



## CHAPTER XII

I. PETER

A.D. 65 (?)

THIS has been described as "perhaps the most lovable book in the New Testament." It is not a doctrinal treatise, though on a chance reference to Christ preaching to the spirits in prison, the doctrine of Purgatory has been built, as insecure a basis for that doctrine as the two Petrine Epistles are for the Papacy. It is not a personal letter ; it is sent to a whole district, and to people whom the writer did not know, " the elect who are sojourners of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia," *i.e.*, modern Asia Minor.

Without any original teaching, and without personal touches, whence comes its charm ?

It is lovable because it brings to troubled and harassed souls a message of comfort. The first persecution for the Christian communities had broken out. In A.D. 64 Nero made the bodies of the suspected sectaries torches to light his gardens. The cue given in Rome, was followed in the provinces. In distant Bithynia the name " Christian " exposed one who bore it to assault, prosecution, and even death. Christ had evidently prepared His followers to expect this

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opposition, and to Peter, his first convinced disciple, he had given distinct commandment, when he was converted, to strengthen his brethren. The persecution affected the brotherhood, *i.e.*, the Christian communities, throughout the world (v. 9), but he wrote to that large group of churches which Paul and others had by this time founded between the Ægean Sea and the Caucasus, a country where persecution and massacre for Christ's name are still in operation. Because he "skills of comfort best" this writer wins an enduring love. As Renan says: "A sweet melancholy, a resigned confidence, fills the composition."

There is no light which illumines the truth of God and the truth of the world to come like the flames of persecution. The treasures of the Eternal become manifest when earthly joys and comforts decline. "What thou understandest not when thou readest thou shalt know in the day of visitation," says the *Imitatio Christi*.

This was the day of visitation, and to those who were exposed to the fiery trial, "pilgrims and sojourners," the lofty words of comfort are addressed. They were natives of Pontus, Galatia, Bithynia, etc.; they were in their fatherland and their homesteads, but as Christians they had become exiles, recognising their home elsewhere. One of the sweetest of early Christian writings says that to Christians "every native land was foreign, but every foreign land was native."

Here is the beginning of that wistful, but inspiring

thought : our home is beyond, our country is not in this world ; we are pilgrims and strangers who must not allow others to detain us in our homeward journey. Here is the beginning of the idea, liable to perversion, and often disastrously perverted, but in its purity the redeeming principle which has been transforming the world since Christ's time, that Christians are a spiritual state within the state, another order living and moving under the visible order. The City of God is on the earth—a new and better Jerusalem—a constitution with Christ at its head. It corresponds to a heavenly city, true realm of God, into which they are introduced at death, who in life have been in the earthly counterpart.

Now in times of ease and prosperity, health, vigour, wealth and comfort, the language of this Epistle is hardly intelligible. It should be kept for dark days ; opened and perused when the storms are breaking, and our hearts are shaking for fear. In times of persecution and fierce trial, in times of loss and failure, when health declines and friends depart, when our best earthly hopes are frustrated, what an unspeakable comfort it is to know that this is only the land of our exile, but heaven is our home ! We were never meant to settle down in this land for a permanency, we only occupy it as a house of pilgrimage ; we lodge in the inn, and sleep, and then pass on towards our blessed destination. They who use this language are then our only consolers.

Yes, the book is lovable, because this mood is inevitable in human life, coming to all at times ; for

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even the young and happy are frequently conscious that they need another country, and even that they need another nature to support their joy. Suddenly in the midst of the golden day a cloud crosses the sun, and a wind shivers over the ripened grain ; then the heart sighs, and understands that its rest is not here. With advancing years the mood becomes more frequent, and with the upward straining of the soul it acquires a persistent hold :

“ The highest mounted soul, he said,  
Still sees the sacred morning spread  
A higher summit overhead.”

The noble and the good and the progressing are the most conscious of their exile ; the earthly souls, forgetting that they are pilgrims, and settling down to the low content of the fleshly life, are already relapsing towards an animal state, out of which they had seemed to emerge.

Two favourite words—one, ἀναστροφή (i. 15, 18, ii. 12, iii. 1, 2, 16), the other, ἀποκάλυψις (i. 7, 13, iv. 13), “ conversation ” and “ revelation ”—form the two foci of the ellipse. Our conduct here and Christ’s revelation there hold together the whole argument, and give shape and beauty to the lovable epistle.

The most striking feature of the letter is the recurring note of the cross, the precious blood, the sufferings of Jesus. This is the theme of the music ; it sounds at every point, all through. It appears as the means of redemption, as the method of holiness, as an example to encourage the sufferers. A new



world seems growing up around the Cross of Christ. It is the symbol, the rallying point, of a new humanity. The *revelation* of Christ and the *conversation* (or manner of life) of men, are developed from the theme of the cross.

There are five paragraphs in the letter, the connection between them being just of that loose order which is appropriate to letters.

Paragraph 1 runs from the opening to ch. ii. 10. The Christian community is designated. Its leading thought is hope ; and the hope rests on the fact of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The hope leads those who cherish it onwards to the imperishable and undefiled inheritance. Thus hope is linked with faith. It is also linked with love. Holiness is an outcome of these three. Oh, the holiness which results from the hope ! the intensity of the love of those who are born anew ! They have tasted of the Lord's graciousness ; they thirst for the pure milk of the word ; they, like stones, but living stones, are built together into the Living Stone, Christ, forming a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, a new nation, a royal priesthood.

As such a sacred church they offer up spiritual sacrifices which are acceptable to God, and at the same time they show Him to men in the marvellous Light.

The second paragraph (ii. 10—iii. 12) gives a vivid sketch of the life among men of those who constitute the Spiritual House. They are only sojourners and pilgrims, in a land of exile, but their life acquires a tone and character, a morality, which cannot be

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produced by any lower principle. There is here nothing monastic or ascetic. This holy and royal priesthood of redeemed people lives among men the life of other men.

They are good *citizens*, faithful and loyal subjects of the State to which they belong. They honour the King. There must have been a strain on this Christian citizenship when the king to honour was Nero. But the principle held and always holds.

If we are included in the Spiritual House, part of the royal priesthood, we shall be the best possible Englishmen, strong and true, brave and fearless, proud of our country, yet recognising the principle expressed by one of her most patriotic poets :

“ They best honour thee, who honour in thee  
Only what is best——”

Loyal to the King and to the Constitution, we shall apprehend the change which has come about in modern governments, the sovereignty being vested in the people, which throws upon every one of us the responsibility of governing the country. In this way a country may become Christian, when a sufficient number of its citizens are in the Spiritual House to bring the spirit and power of that higher government into the administration and legislation of the State.

These citizens enjoy freedom, because they are in bondage to God. They walk freely among men, because they are bound to God. They are united to one another in a brotherhood, the brotherhood of Humanity. This more and more emerges as the distinctive note of Christianity ; it is traced up to Christ's inclusive

truth of God's Fatherhood. The Spiritual House exists in the world to train men in brotherhood, by drawing them together in an exalted fellowship and teaching them to interest themselves in one another in practical ways. It is understood that this mutual service of love is the worship, the spiritual sacrifice, acceptable to God.

Then follow directions for servants, in the Christian brotherhood, who formed a considerable proportion of the first Christian communities. We are not here dealing with slaves, but with servants in the household, many of them serving masters who were not Christians. How does the Christian principle manifest itself in them?

They will be dutiful and sweet, even to churlish masters. And they will be able to keep up that character by remembering the example of their own Master, Jesus Christ, who washed the feet of his disciples, and was among them as One that served. They will have before their eyes Christ, as he was on the cross, dying for them, bearing their sins in his own body. Healed by his bleeding wound, brought into the fold of the Good Shepherd by his death, kept now in the right way by his oversight, they can fill their humble station as servants to his glory.

This loftiest consideration is brought forward to show the lowliest how to live. Perhaps there is no greater or more miraculous paragraph in the New Testament than this, in which the Theology of the Gospel is brought into intimate connection with the practical life of servants.

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The Theology which represents God as stooping to men, and assuming a servant's form to save them, makes the distinctions between man and man seem small. It appeals first and straightest to the poor and needy, the oppressed, the outcast, the pariah. It is levelling, no doubt, but not in the sense that it brings the lofty down—"Fear God, honour the King"—rather it lifts the lowly up. The servant, and even the slave, acquires a high spiritual value, for he is brought into just the same direct relation with God through Christ as his Master.

Then the woman question emerges. What will women who are built into the spiritual house be in the concrete practical life of the world? The answer here is not satisfying to the modern aspirations of women, but it is to be viewed in contrast with the depressed condition of women in the ancient world. Here the stress is on the equality of man and wife as fellow heirs of the grace of God. The subordination of wife to husband, and the directions for modest and sober dressing are the commonplace of such counsels; but the new note is that for woman, as for man, there is "the hidden man of the heart," the inner life which constitutes the value of personality, and that women are to God as men.

In the *Ana ittišu* of the pre-Semitic Sumerian Babylon the law ran: "If a wife hates her husband and has said, 'You are not my husband,' one shall throw her into the river; if a husband has said to his wife, 'You are not my wife,' he shall pay half a mina

of silver." That is the old time principle of the treatment of "the weaker vessel." But the Christian law brings in the idea of chivalry. If there is a "weaker vessel" the claim is at once established for special honour and love. Manhood in Christianity is shown not by oppressing, but by honouring, woman, on penalty of losing the power of prayer.

Thus Christianity made, or remade, the State and the home. The whole community is harmonious, peaceful, humble, realising the picture drawn in a Hebrew poem (Ps. xxxiv. 12-16) of those who love life, and whom God blesses.

A third paragraph (iii. 13—iv. 11) turns towards the central thought of the letter, viz., the persecution. Suffering and defamed, how are they, the Spiritual House, the Royal Priesthood, to behave? Like their Royal Priest himself. How did the world treat him? He was killed—the just for the unjust—at least the body was killed; but he in the spirit visited the souls that had perished in the deluge, and preached His Gospel to the so long dead. They are baptised, which is for them like Noah's ark in the flood; let their washing of suffering, though it be unto death, only liberate the spirit from sin. Keeping their eyes on Him, they will not be affected by the sufferings of this present time. They will be gentle, and conciliatory to all men, ready with an answer to justify their faith.

The end of all things was at hand, that was the firm belief of those early days of Christianity. They must

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be sober and watchful, and minister to one another the gifts which God has given them, that God may be glorified in all through Jesus Christ.

Then a brief paragraph mentions explicitly the "fiery trial" (iv. 12-19). They must suffer as Christians—here the name, doubtless of reproach, is adopted, and occurs for the first time. They will share Christ's sufferings. Judgment must begin with the House of God. They may commit their souls to their faithful Creator without misgiving, whatever happens. This persecution, world-wide as it was (*cf.* v. 10), came in His order. Shall not a Maker make? Does He not know when a furnace is necessary? Will He put His material into it without reason, or for its hurt?

The writer then calls himself a Fellow-Elder. He knew nothing, of course, of the later theory which made him the first Pope, and the ruler of the Church. He urges the elders in all the churches to be shepherds of the flock, and to avoid that lording over the people which is the besetting sin of ecclesiastics. The elders must rule by their good example.

"This noble example to his sheep he gave,  
That first he wrought, and afterwards he taught,  
Out of the Gospel he the wordés caught,  
And this figure he added eek thereto,  
That if gold rusté, what shall irón do?"

Thus was the Christian ministry designated and defined from the beginning; not a priesthood—the whole community was the priesthood—but the natural

control of the elder over the younger in the Church. The Saviour himself is called the "Chief Shepherd"; all others are only under-shepherds. The proud title of Chief Pontiff, Bishop of Bishops, Vicegerent of God, would have seemed blasphemous to Peter. The Lord himself was Chief Shepherd, which, as Deissmann says, is not crowning him with a jewelled diadem of gold; it is more like plaiting a wreath of simple green leaves to adorn his brow.

The tiara is not for this world, but for the undying world that is coming.

This natural rule of the elders, the experienced, over the younger is, however, only part of a general principle of mutual submission. All are to cover themselves with an apron of humility, for God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble, as *Proverbs* says (iii. 34, in the lxx.).

They must be sober and vigilant, though without care, because a vigilant adversary, like a raging lion, was watching to devour them. It is only for a time. The eternal glory in Christ will dawn—how soon! And meanwhile God is able to perfect, to establish, to strengthen them; His might endures for ever and ever. Silvanus was the amanuensis, perhaps that same Silvanus who was the companion of Paul, now dead. Mark is also with the writer, who sends the greetings of the elect lady in Babylon. We cannot tell whether "Babylon" is a cryptogram for Rome, where the persecution was at its height, so that it was desirable to conceal the dating of the letter, or whether



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Peter was actually in Babylon preaching, and establishing the Church in that distant city.

Clement of Rome, writing in A.D. 96, denies the symbolic meaning ; and though he speaks much of Peter and Paul he only speaks of Paul being martyred in Rome. On the other hand, a persistent tradition said that Peter was in Rome and was crucified there.

The presence of Mark has an interest, because the next book in the historical New Testament is the Gospel according to Mark ; and Mark's position as the " son " and interpreter of Peter gives to the memoirs of Jesus published in his name a special authority.

The Church's bond was to be sealed by a mutual kiss, and, notwithstanding the sufferings and fears of persecution, peace would be to all who were in Christ.

Thus this lovable composition, which has always been attributed to Peter, Christ's first avowed disciple and confessor, closes with the sweet word of peace.



XIII

MARK

A.D. 66 (?)



## CHAPTER XIII

MARK

A.D. 66 (?)

FOLLOWING the letter of Peter came Mark's Gospel—dates of course are unknown—Peter was gone; his amanuensis and interpreter, who had heard him tell everywhere—even in Babylon?—the story of Jesus, thought it good to write down what he remembered.

If you look back over the preceding pages you realise how the main body of the New Testament was already written, before a Gospel narrative was attempted. The facts of the life of Jesus were on the lips of the apostles; the doctrine of Jesus, and the doctrine about him, had reached a fulness and completeness that could not be exceeded. The necessity for a written life of Jesus only emerged when the first generation of the disciples was passing away, and it began to appear that the immediate Parousia on which they had counted would be postponed.

The first understanding had been that Jesus would come again in that generation; and all the letters which we have been reviewing were written in some such expectation. But the New Testament literature took a turn, when it was realised that the postponement of the Parousia demanded as faithful a record of the

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life of Jesus as could be gathered from the oral tradition, and from the notes, which had done service for the first apostles.

Before glancing at the contents of this earliest Gospel, five remarks may be made for those who have never grasped the significance of the fact, that these gospel narratives were not the first writings of the New Testament, but followed on the Pauline epistles, which constitute the first line of historic evidence for the Fact of Christ.

1. Christian doctrine was fully developed, one might almost say completed, before a gospel was written. Christ was a living, working power. A multitude of people all over the Roman Empire had been gathered into the faith, had been transformed in life, baptized in the name of Christ, and formed into churches, societies for worship and service, and Christian propaganda; Christianity had started on its victorious career, and possessed in the living words of its teachers all that was necessary to consolidate and extend it, and yet no one had taken in hand to write a life of the Master.

Christianity, therefore, while it rests on the great facts recorded in the Gospels, cannot be said to rest on these gospels themselves. Its reality was something antecedent to, existing apart from, the story of the life. That reality was found in the Spiritual House, the holy priesthood, the communities of those, who, being born again by faith in Christ, were able to claim and enjoy his invisible spiritual presence. We saw

what a part the Cross played in the Epistle of Peter. Paul was equally filled with the truth of the Cross and of the Resurrection and of the heavenly reign of Christ. The proper Deity of Christ was so transcendent a fact that it threw for a time the human life into the background. Christ was already recognised as One who had entered the world from a pre-existent state, who had lived the brief life, and died the sacrificial death for a definite purpose, and had returned to the Father from whom He came.

This cosmic movement of incarnation, identification with humanity, death for humanity, resurrection and ascension, and the permanent session of the God-man, Jesus Christ, at God's right hand in heaven, were the substance and the dynamic of the new religion. Its apostles set forth Christ and Him crucified; they determined to know nothing else; Christ after the flesh they left aside for later consideration. The immediate burning and converting theme was Jesus and the Resurrection, or Christ bearing the sins of the world in his own body on the tree.

When the records of the "years passed beneath the Syrian blue" had to be recalled and jotted down, the Christ of the Evangel, the Saviour of the World, the prospective Judge before Whom we must all appear, was presupposed, the familiar theme of preaching and edification.

Christ was already much more than the Jesus of the Gospels when the Gospels began to be written. Christianity was a living force, conscious of a mission,

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and of its own deathless power, when the human portrait of its founder came to be drawn. How these records of a human life harmonise with the picture of incarnate God is the miracle of the Gospels, greater than any miracle recorded in them.

For, speaking broadly of the four Gospels, we are bound to admit that in all the incidents and speeches recorded in them, Jesus bears himself in a way, which, though it is thoroughly human, is yet at the same time, divine. The abiding reason for believing in the veracity of the narratives is the standing impossibility of any one inventing them. And if it is inconceivable how even a consummate artist could have drawn a portrait in such subtle harmony with the fact of God incarnate living a human life, it is still more absurd to suppose that idle legends and superstitions, and the endless vagaries of hearsay could have produced such a portrait. It is in this sense that the Gospels carry their own testimony within them. Let it be granted that no external testimony *could* authenticate them, they need no external testimony. Only fact, and not fiction, could have produced them, whatever human blemishes may be found in their composition or transmission.

2. The Gospel narratives were set down with hesitation and reluctance. Instinctively men felt how easily the spirit might be lost in the letter. They knew that Jesus had written nothing himself, they did not remember that he told his followers to write anything. Dryden says with shrewd penetration :

" He could have writ himself, but well foresaw  
The event would be like that of Moses' Law ;  
No written laws could be so plain, so pure,  
But wit may gloss, and malice may obscure."

And if Jesus did not wish to write down his laws, his followers might well shrink from writing about him. Certainly no evangelist makes the least claim to inspiration or infallibility. The inspiration and infallibility are only in the Person whom they describe. Where they succeed in bringing him before the reader those qualities are unmistakable. But the writers would not deprecate criticism, or noisily assert their own veracity. Their manner is very singular ; they are absolutely self-effacing. If they refer to themselves at all it is only in cryptograms. They would be astonished at their repute in later ages ; they would not recognise themselves under the symbols of the Lion, the Ox, the Eagle, the Man, with which art has made us familiar. Their attitude is deprecatory : " We are afraid to write at all ; the theme is quite beyond us ; but the story must be told ; we set down what we know, as simply and straightforwardly as we can ; there must be innumerable omissions and uncertainties of the dates and the order of events ; we do not venture to interpret or to comment. But such things as are remembered of his earthly life and death we pass on, begging the reader to forgive and to forget us."

3. The narratives were scrappy and hasty, consisting of things which the apostles told in their preaching. They are still dominated by the prevailing conviction

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that the Parousia, if not immediate, would not be long delayed. The fourth Gospel stands in another category, as we shall see ; but the three Synoptic Gospels tell the story of Jesus in the spirit of writers who had thought for years that it would not be necessary to write, and then had to write in emergency. The fall of Jerusalem and the Temple, and the passing away of the Jewish State, constituted the crisis, and opened the eyes of the Christians to the fact that the end of things was not identical with that catastrophe, but would come later ; how much later they did not know. The Gospels were written for a brief postponement of the return, with no thought of satisfying remote generations. That they stand the pitiless scrutiny of scholars after nineteen centuries is an extraordinary evidence of their veracity.

4. A fourth remark has to be made. The gospel narratives were only written when the generation of those who had known Jesus was passing away. Does not a certain inaccuracy creep in ? Will there not be obscurities which cannot be cleared up ? Will not the order of events, and even the locality, be lost ? In the matter of speeches or sermons, will not much be changed, and will not later ideas and interpretations intrude, and be presented as part of the original discourse ? Will not the discourses be broken up and pieced together ? Will not fragments appear in different connections ?

Certainly these things are liable to happen ; and the fact that we have four Gospels instead of one enables us to see that they did happen.



But if these blemishes are manifestly present, is not the story discredited? Are we not driven from every foothold of infallibility and inerrancy? The answer may be given with a confidence which increases in proportion as the facts are appreciated, No. The infallibility of the Gospel narratives is not that of words, or phrases, or details, but that of the Personality successfully presented in spite of all the faults and frailties of the writers and the writing. The impression which the life of Jesus made on the apostles was indelible. He was photographed on their memories. And Mark's Gospel especially betrays this characteristic. Peter remembered, he was always preaching and teaching his memories; Mark, his dragoman, received and retained the impressions, the very phrases, the turns, unmistakeable, original.

Under certain conditions the memory becomes miraculously retentive. Irenæus remembered the teaching of his master Polycarp in this way: "These things even then owing to the memory of God that was bestowed on me, I heard diligently, memorising them not on paper, but on my heart, and I always, owing to the grace of God, genuinely ruminate on them." A Jew who had become a Christian told the writer that he knew the whole of the Old Testament by heart, beside much of the Talmud and the Kabbala. If the Hebrew Bible were lost, it could be recovered from that one mind.

Printing and cheap literature have discouraged the use of the memory. But in earlier times it was quite

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easy to retain events, words, discourses, in mind, year after year, and even generation after generation.

5. The fifth remark, therefore, leading up to a survey of this Gospel, is that the life of Jesus, his words and deeds, were held in memory, constantly repeated, jotted down by preachers and teachers, for a period of thirty or forty years. Then attempts were made to write a connected account of his life. The earliest attempt of this kind that has reached us, is the brief, fresh, vigorous narrative of Mark. Christians were already living in the faith, drawn around the person of their invisible Lord ; they were accustomed to realise his presence, and to receive directions through the Spirit. But here, in such a Gospel as this, they were able to look on him as in a miniature, and to grasp the ministry as a whole, from the baptism of water to the baptism of death.

This gospel has the advantage of compactness. It can be read from beginning to end in an hour. Twenty-two octavo pages of good print present the life and death of the Saviour of the World.

If we now see the place the story has in the literature, and the part it is able to play in the understanding of Christ, let us take it up in order to obtain a bird's-eye view of the life of Jesus.

How compact and clear it all is ! If the reader reads it through at a sitting he obtains much the same effect as if he gazed on the portrait of the Master drawn by a good portrait-painter. It is almost incredible that any unprejudiced reader, coming upon

the narrative for the first time, could mistake it for fiction. It is too artless and unliterary to be a work of the imagination. It carries with it the evidence of reality. The scheme of the work is simplicity itself :

The Preparation, ch. i. 1-13.

The Galilean Ministry, ch. i. 14-ix.

The Judean Ministry, ch. x.-xiii.

The Great Act of Death, ch. xiv.-xv.

Resurrection, ch. xvi. 1-8 (an appendix 9-20).

In this brief scheme you see at once the central position of the Cross. The climax is always in view. We read of the life in order to reach the death ; it is the story quite as much of One who died as of One who lived.

The Preparation is brief. John's ministry is linked on with Mal. iii. 1, and introduced to explain the Baptism. The temptation of Jesus is told in the inimitable phrase : " He was with the wild beasts, and the angels ministered unto him."

The Galilean ministry falls into three paragraphs : (1) ch. i. 14-iii. 6. Everything is full of promise. The doctrine is fresh, the healing is miraculous. The crowd is about him, so that he can hardly find leisure to eat. Leisure for teaching his disciples is only secured by journeys across the Lake or to remote regions. It is like the beautiful dawn of a spring day. But the clouds come up. The Jews oppose, and the paragraph ends with the first attempt to kill him. The ground of opposition is, that he *will* forgive sinners,

that he will mingle with them, that he makes light of fasting and other external religious observances, and that he disregards the Rabbinical interpretation of the Sabbath. He breaks the Sabbath as they understand it.

The hostility is at once deadly.

(2) ch. iii. 7—vi. 29. This paragraph begins with the appointment of his twelve apostles, and ends with their return from a trial mission on which he sent them. In the course of this section we have a little cycle of parables, including one which is not repeated in other Gospels, that of the earth bringing forth the harvest from the sown seed automatically. Then follows a small cycle of miracles, showing the power of Jesus over disease and over the forces of nature. Then comes a visit to Nazareth and the refusal of the people of his native place to receive him because he was a carpenter !

(3) ch. vi. 30—ix. 50. The Jewish authorities are now in open opposition. They are determined to destroy him, and he retires to Cæsarea Philippi, in order to lead his followers to the great confession of who he is. They avow their belief that he is Christ, the Son of God. Then he takes three of the disciples up the Mount, and is transfigured ; they see his heavenly glory. As he comes down he tells them that he must die. Three times, first after the Confession, secondly, after the Transfiguration ; thirdly, in fullest detail, on the way to Jerusalem, he shows that he had come into the world to die at the hands of the Jewish authorities, and to rise again.

Thus ends the Galilean ministry.

The Judean ministry in this Gospel is briefer (ch. x—xiii.). On the sacred soil of Judea he utters some of his most characteristic teaching; first on the sanctity of marriage, then on the heavenly character of little children, then upon the danger of wealth, and lastly on the necessity of self-sacrifice. Thus, laying foundations of social reform and progress, he passes through Jericho and Bethany, on his way to Jerusalem. The holy city he enters with symbolic triumph. Meek, and sitting upon an ass, he comes, the deliverer of the poor and needy, the founder of a new order. He cleanses the Temple with an authority which overrides all existing authorities in Jerusalem, and he meets the subtleties of Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians with a simple wisdom which leaves no room for a reply. He leaves the Temple, and on the Mount of Olives delivers an apocalypse to His disciples which foreshadows the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and his return in the future, thus laying the foundation of the great hope on which the first generation built. The tone of the Pauline epistles on this subject is explained by this discourse set down in the earliest gospel.

The narrative now enters into a minute account of the trial and death. An eighth of the Life is occupied with a description of the Death; a fact which exactly harmonises with the preaching of Paul, who preached Christ—crucified. As crucified Jesus became the great object of preaching. He was not to be dissevered from the Cross. The episodes are full of deep meaning. In

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the house of Simon the leper, a loving woman anoints him for his burial. In a house appointed in the city he eats a supper with his disciples, and makes it a symbolic institution, to be observed for ever "till he comes." After supper they go together to Gethsemane, and one of his own disciples brings the soldiery of the Temple to arrest him.

At this point the author, Mark, seems to attach his modest sign-manual. The young man, present with the night garment about him, and flying when the soldiers seized him, must be Mark, the writer (ch. xiv. 51).

The trial before the high priest takes place, an obvious formality to establish a foregone conclusion. Peter denies him thrice; Mark heard Peter make that sorrowful confession whenever he told the tale. The condemned Man is brought before Pilate to receive the death sentence. Is he the King of the Jews? Yes,—and then He is imperturbably silent. Pilate uneasily condemned Jesus and released Barabbas. The crucifixion, death and burial are described.

Finally, there is the first sweet, thrilling breath of Resurrection (ch. xvi. 1-8). The fragment added from another source (verses 9-20) beautifully completes the Gospel which had been left unfinished (the particle, *γάρ*, could not end a sentence, still less a book) giving in a brief form the commission to the disciples after the Resurrection, the Ascension into heaven, and the beginning of the mission which resulted from the events recorded.

It will be seen how correctly this book is described in the opening sentence: "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ." When it was written, the Gospel was already established and winning a widening way through the Roman world. Already the risen and ascended Christ was known, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. The supper was kept, the assemblies met week by week, the faith was marching forward to conquer the world. To recall and to recount the brief story of the life and death of the Master was to go back to the beginning, to present, as it were, the little grain of mustard seed out of which this spreading plant had grown.

The story is so fresh and fascinating, that the only error we are likely to make in regard to it is that of mistaking "the beginning of the Gospel" for the whole, and depreciating the tree in favour of its seed.





XIV

MATTHEW

A.D. 75 (?)



## CHAPTER XIV

MATTHEW

A.D. 75 (?)

THIS Gospel presents a fascinating study. You note that it is in bulk nearly double the size of the earlier work. It contains the whole of Mark, with the exception of about thirty verses. The first impression is, that the writer used the Gospel of Mark as a framework, and filled it in, furnishing a prologue and an epilogue from other sources. The prologue is a genealogy of Jesus, and an account of the infancy. The epilogue is an account of the resurrection, ascension, and missionary mandate of the Risen Lord, which in Mark was wanting, and had to be supplied by an appendix, drawn from another authority.

But the additions are, in the main, sayings, discourses, and parables of the Master.

Now the earliest note of the origins of the Gospels that has come down to us, the quotation from Papias in Eusebius, says: "Matthew wrote the sayings (*Logia*) of Jesus in the Hebrew dialect, and every one interpreted them as he could."

It seems, therefore, a fair presumption that the additional matter in *Matthew* was taken in the main from these *Logia* of Matthew in the Hebrew dialect;

and if this be so, we can see why the Gospel, compiled by another hand, might be described as "according to Matthew."

No date can be fixed. But some time after the year A.D. 70 this author, using Mark, the Logia of Matthew, and some other Palestinian authority, composed a life of Jesus, with a definite object in view. He wished to put the story in an Old Testament setting. Jesus was the Jewish Messiah (ch. i. 1-20, iii. 9, etc.).\* The very incidents of his life had been foretold by the prophets. The purpose evidently was to commend the Gospel of Jesus to Jews by showing how it grew out of the Law and the Prophets.

The mark of artistic composition is revealed in the arrangement; for there are seven sections. This is the First Gospel's peculiar note. Seven is the number of completeness, and the biography has a completeness, not by virtue of a chronological order, nor by any attempt to furnish an exhaustive account of the Master, but by the inclusion of teaching as well as actions, and by showing clearly the beginning and the end of this life, which Mark was content to show merely as a single picture within the terms of a few months.

This sevenfold division is marked, perhaps unconsciously, by the use of the Greek words, *καὶ ἐγένετο*, "and it came to pass," though the first section begins with a *γένεσις*, birth, and the second with a *παράγινεται*, John the baptiser comes on the scene.

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\* Cf. Prof. Willoughby Allen's Introduction to his commentary on Matthew, p. lxiv.

Let us map out the book in this way and make a conspectus, before we review the parts separately :

I.—Chs. i., ii. The genealogy of Jesus is traced through his reputed father Joseph back to Abraham. Then the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem is recounted, not in the way of human generation, but by the operation of the Holy Ghost. Certain memorable stories of the infancy are recorded.

II.—Chs. iii.—vii. 27. John comes on the scene, as the forerunner, and then Jesus (iii. 13). The baptism takes place, and the temptation in the wilderness, told by Mark in a sentence, is detailed, evidently from the account which Jesus himself gave of it.

Then the main teaching of the Galilean message is pieced together in one remarkable discourse, which, under the name of the Sermon on the Mount, stands as the high-water mark of human ethics.

III.—Ch. vii. 28—x. *καὶ ἐγένετο*. Then follows a series of miracles which form a counterpart to the teaching of the Sermon.

IV.—Chs. xi.—xiii. 52. *καὶ ἐγένετο*. A series of characteristic parables and other discourses, is set side by side with the miracles of the preceding section.

Thus this first half of the book aims at presenting completely the ministry of Jesus as a prophet or teacher, confirming his teaching by the exercise of supernatural powers.

V.—xiii. 53—xviii. *καὶ ἐγένετο*. When the Parables were ended, and his programme was presented, the hostility with the Jewish ecclesiastical authorities

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began ; and this section records the development of the conflict.

VI.—Chs. xix.—xxv. καὶ ἐγένετο. He left Galilee and went up to Jerusalem. The narrative does not distinguish previous journeys to the capital. He goes up to Jerusalem, to accomplish his ministry by dying.

VII.—Chs. xxvi.—xxviii. καὶ ἐγένετο. The final scene, the supper, the betrayal, the trial, the death and the resurrection are recorded.

And a remarkable world-wide bearing of the whole story is given in the closing passage.

But in this life of Jesus the main interest attaches to the matter which is supplementary to Mark, *i.e.*, to those parts which may be reasonably identified with the *Logia* of Matthew. For those discourses of Jesus, which Matthew preserved in his memory, or took down at the time of their delivery, constitute the oldest and surest stratum of the evangelic narrative. It is on the strength of this element in the book that *Matthew* is put before *Mark* ; though *Mark* as a finished work is undoubtedly earlier than *Matthew* as a finished work, the information traceable to the apostle Matthew takes precedence of the narrative of Mark, who had not seen or heard Jesus, but was only the dragoman of Peter.

Naturally, we wish we had these discourses in the Hebrew dialect, *i.e.*, the Aramaic, in which Jesus spoke them and Matthew wrote them ; for it is a precarious task to reconstruct the original Aramaic from the Greek translation ; and yet the attempt made by Dalman and others to put the words of Jesus back into

Aramaic results frequently in a fresher realisation of his meaning.

But though we listen to Jesus only in a Greek translation, there is no mistaking his note and accent. We seem to hear his voice, and to see his face as he spoke. No stupidity or perversity of man has ever been able to destroy these parables and apophthegms of Jesus. They seem to be inexhaustible in meaning and vitality. Though, in their literary form, they are later than the Pauline epistles, they are in reality the groundwork of all Christian teaching. Nay, let us say boldly, they constitute an ever-flowing fountain-head of religious revelation and ethical truth, to which the weary generations of men constantly recur. Tolstoi in the nineteenth century finds them as marvellous as Matthew found them in the first. And it is no exaggeration to say that for the twentieth century they have a new meaning, a freshness and authenticity, which gives us hope of fashioning the religion of the future from this source alone.

Let us glance over the *Logia* of Matthew, as they are embedded in our first gospel.

I. To begin with, there is the Sermon on the Mount (chs. v.—vii.). Many passages of the sermon occur in the third gospel in different connections ; but the stated and deliberate utterance of all the Galilean teaching in a single discourse constitutes a new Law. In fact, Jesus has the Law of Moses in view, and with unostentatious but unflinching authority sets his own word over against the demands of that hoary and

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venerated Code. "But I say unto you" is a most revealing expression, when it is remembered how unhesitatingly all to whom he spoke regarded the Law of Moses as the direct ordinances of God.

The Sermon on the Mount is thus avowedly the completion of the Mosaic Law. The Mountain in Galilee is the counterpart of Sinai.

It is very generally admitted that the ethical principles enunciated in the Sermon are such, that if men would only observe them, the house of humanity would be founded upon a rock, against which the floods of chance and change would beat in vain.

And because this new and saving Law issued from the heart and mouth of Jesus, we are sure that He came from God. "But I say unto you" settles the question of his status and authority. What need we any further witness?

The Sermon on the Mount, fairly and honestly understood, establishes the divine nature of the Preacher. If anyone asks why we call Jesus divine, and even identify him with God, or why we distinguish him from other men, and set him in a place of unique authority, the real answer is: The reason for this inference is in the Discourse, chs. v.—vii., even more than in the account of the Virgin birth in chs. i.—ii.

The Virgin birth is a point difficult to demonstrate, and open to very easy questioning; but the whole trend and connection of the Sermon on the Mount speaks for itself, and of itself answers all cavil. The human lips which laid down this conception of God and



man, this rule of human conduct, this outlook of human destiny, are also divine lips. The person here speaking, though unquestionably man, is assuredly God.

We may observe that v. 2, vi. 33, vii. 1—27, illustrate the elements which are due to the *Logia*, besides the whole structure and connection of the Sermon.

2. Here is another Logion—the sons of the Kingdom will be cast out, and strangers shall come from the East and the West to take their places (ch. viii. 11–12).

3. The favourite quotation of Jesus, from Hosea vi. 6 (*cf.* xxiii. 23).

4. The commission to the Twelve, ch. x. 5–8, 23, also verses 24–41.

In Luke a good part of this commission is given to the Seventy.

5. Ch. xi. 2–30. The four Logia about John the Baptizer, and then the exultant statement of the relation between the Father and the Son, with the significant invitation attached: “Come unto Me, all ye that labour.”

6. Ch. xii. 5–7. The mystical saying that something greater than the Temple was there in his person; the humanitarian saying, that man is of more value than a sheep (verses 11, 12), the terrific answer to those who blaspheme the Holy Spirit by attributing the gracious works of Jesus to Satan (verses 25–45).

7. Ch. xiii. The parable of the Tares, v. 24–30, 36–43. The leaven, v. 33. The parabolic method justified by the Psalm lxxviii. 2, verses 34–35. Other

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brief parables, verses 44-50, the Treasure, the Pearl, the Dragnet. The scribe who is a disciple of the Kingdom (verses 51-52).

8. Ch. xv. The Pharisees are blind guides, verses 12-14. The touching word of patriotism—that he was sent to the lost sheep of Israel, verse 24.

9. Ch. xvi. 17-19. The saying: Thou art Peter.

10. Ch. xvii. 20. Faith as a grain of mustard-seed.

11. Ch. xviii. Humility and a child, verses 3-4. The angels of children behold the face of God, verse 10. The great passage on seeking the lost, on the discipline of the Church, and on the need of forgiving, verses 12-35.

12. Ch. xix. The eunuchs of the Kingdom, verses 10-12. The twelve thrones and the twelve tribes, verse 28.

13. Ch. xx. The labourers in the vineyard, the first last, the last first, verses 1-16.

14. Ch. xxi. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, verse 16. The two sons, verses 28-32. The Kingdom taken from the Jews and given to another nation, verse 43.

15. Ch. xxii. The man without a wedding garment, verses 1-14. The greatest commandment and the second like unto it, verses 35-40.

16. Ch. xxiii. The invective against Scribes and Pharisees and lament over Jerusalem.

17. Ch. xxiv. False prophets and cooling love, verses 10-12. False Christs, eagles and carcasses, verses 23-27. The sign of the Son of Man in heaven, verse 30a. The suddenness of the Parousia, verses

37-41. The servant must watch and expect it, verses 43-51.

18. Ch. xxv. The great parables, The Ten Virgins, and the Talents, and the prophecy of final judgment.

19. Ch. xxvi. How He could summon the angel-legions, but in that case the Scriptures would not be fulfilled, verses 52-54.

Now when we review these *Logia*, the earliest recorded presentation of Jesus, and so far more satisfactory than Mark's Gospel as that this is a view of Jesus from within, while that second gospel is a sketch of him from without, what impression does he make upon us?

Is it not the impression of just such a Person and Character as are always assumed in Paul's letters? Is not the Christ of Paul exactly the counterpart of the Jesus that is thus presented in our earliest biographical source? Paul seems to know him from an inner experience, but the Christ he knows is precisely the person of this self-revelation in the *Logia*. For there are three main characteristics of the Jesus of the *Logia* :

1. There is his amazing and unfaltering attitude to the older revelation of the Law. He treats that venerated authority as one that is under and not above him. Quoting the unquestioned Divine precepts of Moses, he modifies them by saying, "But I say unto you."

2. He states explicitly his unique relation with the Father, which is such that he alone can bring men to the knowledge of the Father. He does not, of course, say that men could not and had not come to God before

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him, or without him; the specific claim he makes is that God as Father was not known, not discovered, not revealed, until he came. But being the unique Son, he knew God as Father, and was able to bring men to God as their Father. And from these *Logia* of Matthew we learn that this claim was followed immediately by the invitation to come unto him, an invitation as wide as humanity, for it applies to all who are weary and heavy-laden.

We learn—and this is Paul's peculiar message—that men will come to him not from Israel alone, but from the East and the West. The exclusiveness of Judaism is transcended. We have clear views of the harvest of the World, of apostolic workers, and the glorious consummation. The Kingdom of God, which was realised on earth at once in the person of Jesus, is seen finally coming, the one thing for which man longs, and for which the earth came into being. All this is just what the letters of Paul pre-suppose.

3. The Church is founded on Peter's confession. Its impregnability is asserted. Jesus will be in it, and with His followers, till the end of the world. The laws of conduct are clearly laid down; all Paul's ethical teaching is taken, or deduced, from these *Logia* of Jesus. And just as in Paul's letters, the eyes of all believers are turned to the Parousia, a final judgment, a settlement of the problem of the world. The probation is over. Christ comes on the clouds of Heaven, and before his judgment seat all must appear.

No wonder Paul inferred, as we saw in his earliest

letters, that the advent of the Lord would be soon, within that generation itself. The Lord Himself expected that it would be soon. When He realised that he would have to die, in order to make atonement for sin, and to rise again, in order to complete men's justification, He made allowance for a possible delay. The Lord would be absent, leaving his affairs to his servants, and would return, suddenly and unexpectedly, but he did not contemplate an age-long delay. The kingdom might tarry, as Professor Hogg puts it, but it need not tarry, if men would only exercise faith.

This Gospel of Matthew, therefore, like St. Paul's epistles, which preceded it in time, but rested largely on the *Logia* which constitute its earliest stratum, gives the plainest directions for conduct, during the delay, however long it may be, before the Parousia.

We are to live in a Church, and for practical, local purposes, churches, in which he is always spiritually present ; we are to guide all our actions by the Sermon on the Mount ; we are to be vigilant, we are always to live as we should if he were returning to-day.

Furthermore, until that coming, and indeed in order to condition his return, we are to engage in a ceaseless missionary enterprise, to make known him and his gospel to all the nations, teaching them his commandments, and baptising them in the threefold name of Father, Son and Spirit.

Thus an explanation emerges of the long and unexpected delay. What might have come in a generation has not come in fifty generations. The vision

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was foreshortened for Jesus and for the evangelist. What seemed close at hand was really distant; for the gospel had to be taken to all nations. The great thought which is now gradually taking hold of the whole Church is certainly the herald of the approaching Advent. For now we begin to see that the whole world is to be evangelised. In 1910, for the first time, missionaries from all over the world gathered in Edinburgh to face, as a whole church, the problem as a whole.

In a very amazing way the earth has been practically contracted, and a thought, or a truth, can reach the whole of mankind at once. The conditions of his return have been prepared by science and commercial enterprise, by electricity, by ocean liners. To us it seems a long delay; the process is slow; and even now the event may lie some distance ahead.

But he gave the word "Watch" at the beginning. We are to pray: "Thy kingdom come: Thy will be done!" for every genuine prayer hastens the day.

And if the Church as a whole would resolve to fulfil that missionary command, and would pray for the labourers and for the means, the time would be shortened, and Christ might come again, to establish the kingdom in righteousness, to reap the harvest of the world, and to finish the purpose which brought him into the world, as recorded in the opening chapter of Matthew. From the standpoint of eternity, a thousand years are as a day.

XV

HEBREWS

A.D. 83 (?)





## CHAPTER XV

HEBREWS

A.D. 83 (?)

THIS epistle is the beginning of the literary and theological period of Christianity, and has a peculiar interest as the forerunner of a movement which has filled old libraries with massive tomes, and pours from the press annually a perfect torrent of books. Of the making of those books there is no end.

The epistles and the two Gospels that we have just studied are popular works, written without any conscious literary effort. They were thrown off by men who were engaged in a missionary task, as the necessary means of carrying out that task. They were practical, produced to meet an immediate need, without any consciousness that they would be of permanent value. Peter was preaching, and told the story of the life of Jesus, and his "interpreter," wrote down the notes. Matthew, one of the twelve, had written down many of the sayings and discourses of the Master. A writer combined these two sources in a systematic narrative. Paul, busy in founding churches, wrote letters, often at high pressure, to give directions in the teaching and practice and organisation of the new religion. There is no trace of a desire

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to produce a literary effect or to win a literary reputation. The complete absence of self-consciousness is the chief note of these writings, though in no books ever written were two personalities made so vivid as the two personalities of Jesus and Paul are in these "occasional" works.

But in *Hebrews* we enter into a different atmosphere altogether. Here is a work written in a thoroughly careful and artistic style. It is a literary composition, more like a sermon than a letter, for it has no address to any particular correspondent or correspondents, though it has the kind of closing salutations and commendations with which an ancient letter usually ends.

It is a treatise on a specific theme. The author desires to adjust the relation between the new religion and the old. It is as if he saw the old passing away with the fall of Jerusalem and the new spreading far and wide through the world, and he wished to arrest the passing system in order to show how it had prepared for its successor. It is a fine conception, worked out with extraordinary eloquence. It has the movement and rush of a great pulpit utterance like Chrysostom's or Bossuet's. Judaism was the type, Christianity the antitype; Judaism was the shadow, Christianity was the substance; Judaism was the preparation, Christianity was the achievement.

In carrying out his plan the writer confronted those whose Christian faith was flagging; they were inclined to relapse from the antitype to the type, from the

substance to the shadow, from the achievement to the preparation. He tried to make them face the issues. He showed them Christ and His supreme claims. "Is there a Christ?" to quote James Smetham, on the *Hebrews*, "Was He made flesh? Did He offer the all-perfect sacrifice? Did He supersede the old order of priests? Is He the mediator of a new and better covenant? What are the terms of that covenant? There are no questions like these . . . I am astonished at the imperative tone of this epistle, and the element of holy scorn against those who refuse to go into these questions carefully."

Any candid reader must share Smetham's astonishment. There is a searching fire in this document; a sword pierces between joint and marrow.

Indeed, this holy mount burns and thunders in a more awe-inspiring way than Sinai itself. Sinai was but the type, the shadow, the preparation; here is Mount Zion, the antitype, the substance, the achievement.

As *Hebrews* is quoted by Clement of Rome in A.D. 97, we have a *terminus ad quem* for fixing the date. Certain expressions rather suggest the time when the persecution of Domitian was breaking out, and Christians were subjected to imprisonment and banishment, the time when John was in Patmos, and when the "brethren of the Lord," hard-working agriculturists, were cited before the Emperor to apologise for their new faith. "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood" (xii. 4). In ch. xiii. verses 2, 13, 19, 23 suggest a time of persecution, of imprisonment and of bonds. Domitian's severe

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policy to the Christians belongs to the year A.D. 83. Under this storm there was a tendency to break from the membership of the Church and to forsake the assemblies (x. 25). With the ancient and haughty claim of Judaism on the one hand, and the awaking suspicion of the Roman Government on the other, the infant Church was ground between the upper and nether millstones. The authorship, the place of writing, the people addressed, are matters only for conjecture ; and there is little use and no satisfaction in suggesting possible names which happen to be known to us, *e.g.*, Apollos, Barnabas, or Priscilla, in order to give colour to the authorship. If we are embarked on this sea of conjectures the most refreshing suggestion is Harnack's, that the writing was the work of that noble Roman lady, the wife of Aquila. On this basis some edifying comments may be built, concerning the eloquence of women, their fitness for theology, and for preaching. The only disadvantage is that the structure comes to the ground, because there is no evidence that Priscilla was the author.

Let us be content with the obvious fact that the Spirit of God speaks through the epistle, and addresses men of all epochs. The message would not gain in power if we knew that it came from Barnabas, the author of that rather feeble epistle which is found in the works of the sub-apostolic Fathers. If we knew that it was Paul's it would be interesting, because we seem to know Paul personally ; but as it very manifestly is not Paul's, though it echoes much of Paul's teaching,

let us take the truths presented to us as coming from an unknown writer in the days of Domitian. We should like to name him, but, what is perhaps better, we can describe him: Lan Alexandrine scholar, acquainted with the writings of Philo, and equally familiar with Paul—especially the *Ephesians*—and with Peter, at any rate Peter's First Epistle, "the finest and most cultured genius," as Dr. McGiffert calls him, "of the primitive Church." If we compare Paul with Luther, says another scholar, we may compare this writer with Melanchthon.

With such an interesting and inspiring work before us, we should make a point of reading the whole document through before entering into details. We should obtain a bird's-eye view of the country from a mountain-top, before we descend into the valleys and traverse the plains.

From ch. i. to ch. x. 18 we have a continuous demonstration of the finality of Christ. As Son of God he is better than the angels (i.-ii.). He is better than the prophetic law-giver, Moses, who founded the older religious system; Moses was a steward in the house, but Christ is the master. This thought leads to the earnest exhortation, not to miss the promised land of rest, through unbelief, as the Israelites were detained in the desert through their unbelief in Moses (iii.—iv. 13). He is better than the high priest. His sympathy is more perfect (iv. 14—vi.). His priesthood goes back to the mystical type of priestly kingship which is suggested by the story of Melchizedek

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(ch. vii.). Thus the new covenant and ministry of Christ are better than the old, being the fulfilment and finality of a religion which had only been a foreshadowing and a promise (viii.—x. 18).

With ch. x. 19 begins a great sustained appeal for the exercise of confidence, steadfastness, faith. Faith is defined, and the bed-roll of the victors of faith is presented. Meanwhile these heroes gather round us like a cloud of witnesses. We may well be constant, whatever trials and difficulties present themselves, for the new covenant, the new mount, the new revelation of God, offer the most consoling contrast to the old.

In place of Sinai and Judaism has come Christ and the heavenly mount. These Christian mysteries, which glow and enlarge before our eyes, until there seems to be a veritable union between heaven and earth, enable us to live a life which, though in the world, is not of the world. We go without the gate, bearing the reproach of Christ, but it is to form a new society of mutual love and care, to be taught by teachers of his appointing, and to offer up to him continually the fruit of the lips.

Only when we have gained a view of the general scope of the discourse are we able profitably to follow out the argument in detail ; but the argument is full of surprises and suggestions. } Half a century had passed since the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. The apostles, including Paul, had been preaching the new truth which He had brought into the world. And it was possible for this writer to view things in

their perspective. By the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the Temple and its sacrifices had passed away, as it has proved to be for ever ; the priests who had maintained an unbroken succession from the time of Aaron, even in the break-up of the captivity, were wiped out.

It is an impressive fact, which gives an extraordinary confirmation to the *Hebrews*, that Judaism, though the Old Testament is its Law Book, has no priesthood, no sacrifices, no altar. Judaism requires *Hebrews* to explain this anomaly.

In this new perspective which was given by history, Christ stood out in contrast with the prophets, from Moses downward, who had preceded Him. They had been preachers of truth, sent by God ; but Christ was a final revelation of God, the reflection of His majesty, and the facsimile of His nature. He came accomplishing all that the prophets yearned for ; he lived, offered himself in sacrifice, abolished the priesthood by becoming the one, sufficient, eternal Priest of humanity, and ascended into the heavenly world, to plead for men, and to plead with men from that higher Order, into which it is his object to draw them. Immediately the responsibility appears of neglecting what such an One says. High above all angels, and all religious teachers, the living Logos, or Word of God, He claims an attention which God alone can claim. Do we refuse to listen because He humbled Himself below the angels, in order to reach us and to save us ? Do we neglect Him because He came to be our faithful high priest, and in order to do his



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saving work, was tempted as we are, and made a propitiation for us, calling us his brothers?

How foolish were they who missed Canaan by disobeying Moses! But what is that flagrant folly compared with our madness, if we miss the eternal rest because we will not believe the Son of God himself?

Our unbelief is the more inexcusable because, unlike the law-giver, who offers only external precepts, the Logos himself, the Word of God, pierces the centre of the heart like a sword. He is present within us, and nothing is concealed from him. All things are open to Him with whom we have to do.

This is the tragic situation of humanity. It can never know God, unless God stoops to its low estate and appears as man; and yet when He appears as man, men deny him, reject and repudiate him, for that very reason. They will listen to a human teacher; they would listen to God; but they will not listen to a God-Man, in whom alone God can speak.

Now this is the great concern of *Hebrews*. The High Priest, typified by all priesthoods, had come to earth, and was now in heaven. He had accomplished a work which had been anguish, humiliation, and death to him. He had become the author of eternal salvation to all who would obey him. All that men had waited and hoped for was done, and done more completely than they ever dreamed. In Christ's own revealing phrase, the Kingdom of God had come; the offering for sin was made; the holy of holies was open. All men might enter in, simply by faith. And now



they would not enter in through unbelief. An inconceivable dulness was on human hearts. By a crass refusal to believe him they crucify the Son of God afresh, repeat his humiliation and his sufferings. Like unfruitful soil, in which the fertilising rains and the living seed produce no harvest, men after a brief trial cast Christ away, and will none of him.

There is a note of anguish in the plea of this preacher. He sees men everywhere rejecting the one way ; and no other way remains. The blood of the covenant and the Spirit of Grace are God's own method, and only method, of revealing Himself to them, and (incredible and monstrous as it seems) they count that blood an unclean thing, they do despite to that Spirit ; they actually tread underfoot the Son of God.

The plea grows passionate—dictated by a genuine horror and a great love. Men create priests, and bow down before them ; they give their priesthoods their dues ; they maintain the sacerdotal institutions through centuries. But what is the point, what is the purpose, of these priesthoods ? They are absolutely meaningless, unless God Himself can become the supreme Priest and Mediator. In Christ, this indispensable justification of priesthoods came. He was “ after the order of Melchizedek ”—a mystical saying, because that name means “ King of righteousness.” He springs not from the order of the Levitical priesthood, but from an antecedent order, *i.e.*, from God Himself. Thus the offering he offered was not like those symbolic offerings which human priests present, animals, or meal offerings

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or incense, or what not. His offering was an inward spiritual act, made possible by the fact that he was the Son of God, and yet man; an offering of such a character and validity that it needed to be made but once; no repetition was necessary or even conceivable.

The priest after the order of Melchizedek assumes a cosmic significance. He is the centre of human story, and round him cluster all religions, and all philosophies, and all sciences. There at the central point of earth and of man, he offered a sacrifice once for all, such a sacrifice that men, all men, for all time, could by faith come under it, and partake of it. "This he did once for all when he offered up himself" (vii. 27). Thus the new covenant foretold by the prophets came. Thus Christ by his blood entered the Holy of Holies—an eternal offering, an offering, that is, which lasts through eternity, and retains its validity always—yes, entered heaven, to appear before the face of God for us. One offering, and then the plea based upon it, for ever applicable and for ever effectual. What a contrast to the old system, which was but the shadow of the real—a great body of priests offering sacrifices daily, a high priest offering a sacrifice within the veil once a year; that was the old method of atonement. But it reached no completeness, it produced no perfection; nay, it precluded perfection, because priests remain always finite, weak, subject to the infirmities of other men; they give the impression that all their offerings will hardly suffice for themselves alone. But this new Priest, being the Son of God—and yet man,

in all points tempted like as we are—could offer a sacrifice of a totally different quality. That transaction in his own consecrated Spirit with God, the outward signs of which were seen in Gethsemane and at Calvary, was the effectual reconciliation of God to man, and of man to God. Henceforth nothing remained, but that we, human beings, should enter into that sacrifice by faith, and that he, the Eternal Priest in heaven, should present us before God in the power and significance of what he had done. When we believe and obey, therefore, everything is accomplished ; we enter at once into the holy place. His flesh is the veil through which we enter ; it hangs between us and God, apparently separating us from God, but in reality drawing us into God. As believers, as baptised, let us have confidence, let us persist, let us continue to *believe*. Let us meet together regularly to provoke one another to love and good works by keeping our faith in perpetual activity.

For there is one appalling possibility which attaches to this new and living way, this religion of belief in Jesus. A religion of works and merits, as all other religions are, is an entry of profit and loss, so much good done set off against the evil, so much merit earned as the purchase-money of eternal felicity. A man may go on earning, losing, balancing, and may hope that the account will ultimately come out in his favour.

But the dazzling glory of the new religion has as its shadow an appalling possibility. If we have by faith entered in, and then fall away, nothing else is

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left. The leap for heaven is made, and the falling short lands us in the abyss. The trampling under foot of the blood of the covenant, and the despite done to the Spirit of Grace, leaves us dull, disillusioned, irreclaimable. A doom of incredible horror opens out. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Here then is the imperative note. We must press on in faith. There is a train of the faithful. Even before Christ came, men, acting according to their lights, were saved by faith, which is "being convinced of what we hope for and confident of what we cannot see." These constitute a cloud of witnesses. Surrounded by the faithful, who have gone before, and fixing our eyes on Jesus, who has now become for us a Leader of faith and can bring it to perfection, we can make a straight and victorious course. What are our trials compared with His? They are merely the chastenings of a Father's love. Let us be diligent and vigilant.

For here is the great reality ; for Mount Sinai, with its terrors and its thunders, is substituted Mount Zion, which means not Jerusalem, the city of ancient solemnities, but the hosts of angels, the firstborn in heaven, and the spirits of just men perfected. This is the Church, visible and invisible, for the two merge in one another. God is in her. Jesus is in her, the Mediator of this new covenant ; the blood of his cross, that eternal and inexhaustible sacrifice of reconciliation, is the central fact ; that blood speaks !

How can men refuse this glorious reality, or, having entered in, how can they seek to go out ? God is a

fire of love, which warms those who are in His heart, but consumes those who are not.

And in this eternal covenant we must love one another, show hospitality, and keep pure ; we must not covet earthly goods ; we have a God, who never leaves or forsakes us ; our wealth is in Him.

Christ is unchanging ; we must be steadfast. We go out to him, bearing his reproach. We are wholly His ; His reproach is our blessedness.

The ministers of the Church, who manage it, and speak the word of God to it, are not priests at all, whose priestly acts are valid, whatever their conduct may be. They are ensamples of the flock. Their faith is for imitation. If they are not " the book of the ignorant," fit to be followed they do not deserve to be listened to, and there is no use for them.

Then the writer, unknown, and addressing people who to us are unknown, asks for prayer. He has a good conscience ; he wants to see his correspondents again. In return for their prayers he utters the noblest benediction in the New Testament : " Now the God of peace who brought again from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep with the blood of the eternal covenant, even our Lord Jesus, make you perfect in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen."

A reference to Timothy, and " them of Italy," for the first time recalls Paul, and reminds us that we are still in the Pauline circle,



XVI

LUKE, THE PHYSICIAN

A.D. 90 (?)





## CHAPTER XVI

LUKE, THE PHYSICIAN      A.D. 90 (?)

THE third gospel and the *Acts of the Apostles* are, by an unbroken tradition, attributed to Luke, who in the closing days of Paul's life was his most faithful companion, "the beloved physician" (Col. iv. 14); "only Luke is with me" (2 Tim. iv. 11). In Phil. 24 he is mentioned with Mark, Aristarchus and Demas. Is it a suggestion of the origin of his gospel that the earliest evangelist was his fellow-worker? From the passages in the *Acts*, where the author unobtrusively uses "we," it is evident that he was a companion of Paul in some of his missionary journeys.

Both books are addressed to Theophilus, and the honourable designation "most excellent" suggests that he was a person of consideration.

There is nothing to fix the date of the composition. If this companion of Paul was still a young man in A.D. 64, he might have written his books as late as A.D. 100, or later; but some minute indications in the *Acts*, pointed out by Sir W. Ramsay, suggest that the date was earlier, though some years after *Mark* and the *Logia* saw the light. The personality of Luke is known, not from the numerous uncertain legends

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which gathered about his name, but from the purport and spirit of his writings. Indeed, the careful reader sees the writer become clear to his imagination, humane, lucid, earnest, cultured.

In the preface of the Gospel he shows that he was not a contemporary of Jesus, as some of his first biographers had been, but had enjoyed access to those who had seen and heard the Master. His use of the documents which were within his reach marks him out as the biographer and historian in the modern sense of those terms. He claims no inspiration, but only says that it seemed good to him to undertake the work ; he professes no infallibility, but only the correctness which results from diligence and accuracy. Unlike the earlier biographers, he made an attempt at chronological order, though the idea of giving exact dates had not occurred to him ; one date (iii. 1), " the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius," raises a fallacious expectation ; the other date (ii. 2), " this was the first enrolment made when Quirinius was governor of Syria," raises questions which are not easily solved. But the orderly arrangement gives the reader a sense of artistic design ; and Sir William Ramsay has established the writer's claim to be one of the most beautiful as well as the most exact of ancient historians.

If history has any validity, these books of Luke's may command credence. To rest their authority on inspiration, and so to put them beyond criticism, is a great blunder ; they are historical works, and to value them aright, we must apply to them the canons of

historical criticism. There is an interesting confirmation of the medical profession of the writer in the fact that the preface is curiously like the preface to the works of Galen, the greatest medical writer of antiquity ; and medical authorities have pointed out a long list of medical terms, or words used in the technical medical sense, especially in the *Acts*.

These indications are comparatively trifling. But there is a certain breadth and spirit in the two compositions which indicate the attitude of the second generation of Christians. Jerusalem had fallen, and Judaism as a system had been shattered. The Gospel of Christ, no longer a form or a sect of Judaism, stepped out to be a world-wide religion.

Luke is the writer who gives one the sense of this new movement. His companionship with Paul the missionary makes his biography of Jesus, and his history of the apostolic journeys, missionary works.

The story of Jesus is written, and fresh materials are recovered, in the light of the fact that the good news contained in that life and death must now be presented to cultured and literary circles, and to men far beyond the limits of Judaism.

We seem, in this presentation of the facts, to embark on an ocean-going ship, and to set sail for the limits of the world. The spirit of a great venture makes every detail interesting.

We may assume with some confidence that Luke used the two sources, *Mark* and the *Logia* ; though we cannot be sure that *Matthew* as it stands was before

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him ; having examined the general contents of those two sources, we may turn our attention exclusively to the *additional material* which Luke was able to contribute, and to the changes which he made in the earlier accounts, though we may not be able to detect the reason of them.

When we begin to collect the special contributions of Luke to the evangelical tradition, we realise that they are among the most precious parts of that tradition. They are the things on which the memory dwells. If we were suddenly asked to quote the things in the three gospels which are most precious to us, it is a high probability that they would be things found only in Luke—the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan, the Penitent Thief.

We feel an inexpressible gratitude to that gifted and graceful writer who rescued so much of the priceless material, which, but for him, might have been lost. For while we are confident that these recovered ingots of the treasure belong to it, and owe nothing to the writer, the principle of selection is plain. Things which had not been appreciated by Mark or Matthew, things that to Jewish eyes might have seemed suspect, flashed out into new meaning, and seemed among the most invaluable elements in the Master's life and teaching, in the light of Paul's mission to the Gentiles and his travels among the other sheep of the one fold. Everything with a humanitarian touch, everything which suggested the substitution of man for Jew, everything which could be narrated of what occurred in Philippi,

in Corinth, in Rome, and far beyond, seemed priceless. The life of Jesus written for the world, the life regarded no longer as that of a Jewish Messiah, but as that of the Saviour of the world, lays stress on things which had been in the background, recalls what Jesus himself had said, and what he had done, to suggest that while His personal mission was to Israel, His ultimate objective was mankind.

The Twelve, intensely Jewish and provincial, had not appreciated the wider element in the life of their Lord ; it had been a stumbling-block to them ; if they recorded it and remembered it, they left it aside as dark and unintelligible. It required the eyes of the missionary Paul, the cosmopolitan instinct, the wider culture, the universalism which could conceive and embrace the world, to do justice to all the Master had said and done.

Eyes are wanted to see, and hearts to understand, a great personality and a great truth ; eyes that are opened, hearts that are expanded. What is there is not, in a properly human sense, there, until the eye and the heart appear which can appreciate it.

Paul's work, and Paul's companion, were needed to bring into relief these episodes and words which showed Jesus as the Saviour of the world. Luke could understand this ; he was by nature, training, and accomplishments, the very man to seize upon these neglected details.

Thus the appeal of his gospel is universal and ever fresh. There is in it a human tenderness, and yet a divine urgency. There is a scorn of earthly treasures,

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verging almost on asceticism—it is as if Theophilus were in danger of mistaking riches for the true wealth—but human worth makes itself felt in every page. It, more than any book of the New Testament, suggests Beauty. If one were to ask the place of Art in the Christian religion, one would be inclined to answer—for the tradition that Luke was a painter, if it had no other foundation, was drawn from the character of his literary work—that the gospel and the early history of the Church were written by an artist, and that while Paul impressed on Christianity the moral and theological stamp, and the earlier narratives impressed upon it the Jewish and religious stamp, it was reserved for Luke to impress upon it the artistic stamp, and so to open up the beginnings of Christian Art.

Broadly speaking, there are sixteen narratives and seventy fragments which we owe to this evangelist. And if we take a rapid survey of the material, we shall become sensible of the motives which dictated the selection, and the spirit that breathes through it.

First there is the gospel of the infancy in ch. i-ii, with a portraiture of Mary, the mother of Jesus, which no doubt suggested the legend that Luke literally painted the first Madonna. A curious impression is made that while Matthew learnt what he knew of these first days from Joseph, Luke learnt these more intimate details from Mary.

Who but the mother would remember how the parents lost the boy in Jerusalem, how they found him in the Temple, and what he said ?

It has been thought that these sayings and doings of the infancy were written in an Aramaic document, from which Luke translated them. The sacred memories of Mary threw an extraordinary light on the world-wide reference of her Son's work.

In keeping with the general tone of the book, the Genealogy, which in Matthew was traced back to Abraham, is here traced back to Adam, or rather to God, for Adam is described as "son of God."

The visit to Nazareth is the occasion of uttering the great humanitarian programme of Christianity (iv. 16-30). The exquisite story of Jesus meeting the widow of Nain, as she took her dead son to burial, and bringing the young man back to life, is introduced.

A significant episode is the sending of the Seventy, as well as the Twelve, on a special mission; for, as seventy was supposed to be the number of the nations, this mission typified Christ's interest, not in Israel only, but in the whole world.

A very human aspect of the life of Jesus is brought into prominence, viz., his social life. On three occasions he is the guest of Pharisees, and his table-talk is recorded (vii. 36, xi. 37, xiv. 1).

Then Luke tells a beautiful incident—how Jesus saw a woman bent double, how she had suffered from this infirmity for eighteen years, and how the good Physician, unsolicited, called to her and spoke the word of healing (xiii. 10-13). Another instance of the unsolicited healing of a sufferer is given in the story of the dropsical man (xiv. 1-6). One more touch, which



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escaped the memory of other evangelists—Christ's spontaneous healing of Malchus' ear, in the garden, seems to illustrate the humanitarian interest. Perhaps also these incidents show the physician's delight in recording how the Lord could effect cures which were beyond the doctors' power.

The additions which Luke makes to the earlier narrative sometimes show a deeper sense of the solemnity of the words of Jesus; to the beatitudes are added corresponding woes (vi. 24-26). This hearer caught an intonation of the Lord's voice which others missed; the command was not only to love our enemies, but "to do good to them that hate" us. (vi. 27). The idea of the whole body being full of light is amplified (xi. 36), as if the thought reverberated in Luke's mind, and the echoes would not die away.

Contrasts are thus drawn out and lines are graven deeper. The urgency makes itself felt. "Enter in at the strait gate" becomes "Agonise to enter in." The stress in the soul of Jesus, who came to send fire, and had a baptism to be baptised with, which straitened him until it was accomplished, communicates itself to his followers. When we have done everything in obedience to the Master, we are still unprofitable servants (xvii. 7-10). What a fateful issue is disclosed in the saying that the rejected Stone, falling on men, will scatter them as dust! (xx. 18). What a searching and memorable utterance was that: "Lo, the kingdom of God is within you!" (xvii. 20 and 21). In the closing passages, too, more than once, the same stress and



emphasis are felt ; everything becomes more poignant, more pressing : " With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you " (xxii. 15). The disciple is told to buy a sword for the stern conflict which lay ahead (xxii. 36). As Jesus himself wept over the city (xix. 41), so he bids the women who follow him to his crucifixion to weep for themselves and their children, and utters the fateful prognostication of coming punishment : this was but as the green tree, what will it be in the dry ?

While this evangelist thus brings out the chiaroscuro of the life, and makes the person of Jesus seem greater and of more world-wide significance, he has preserved also passages of the Teaching, for which we can never be thankful enough. The *Logia*, after all, contained but a selection of that rich store. Luke had access to another set of *Logia* which might have been collected to illustrate the " grace of God appearing to all men." Here comes in the exquisite story of the woman who loved much because she was much forgiven (vii. 36-50). Here is the rebuke to the disciples who would have called down fire on the Samaritan town, and the deep remark, happily preserved in the margin, " Ye know not what spirit ye are of " (ix. 51-56). It is characteristic that Christ's interest in the Samaritans—the Gentile, the worse than Gentile from the Jewish point of view—is frequently brought out. It is a Samaritan who shows his gratitude for the healing (xvii. 11-19). Who but Luke would have preserved the parable of the Good Samaritan, which shows that while priest and Levite

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failed in common humanity, this despised and hated stranger overflowed with charity, and was proposed as an example for the disciples to imitate? (x. 25-37.)

Here is that profoundly human picture of the two sisters, Martha and Mary (x. 38-42), and that broad-minded correction of the error which sees in accidents special judgments (xiii. 1-9). Here are the searching parables which expose the fallacy of riches, the rich man and Lazarus (xvi. 19-31), and the rich fool who died when his wealth was stored (xii. 13-21). Here too is that great series of parables which illustrate in an ascending scale the attitude of Christ to lost humanity, the shepherd seeking the lost sheep, the woman seeking her lost drachma, the father waiting to receive and welcome his lost son (ch. xv.).

Here also is the insistence on importunity in prayer, illustrated by the importunate friend and the importunate widow, and the human interest which makes Christ ready to use the example of an unjust judge, in order to show how God, *a fortiori*, will respond to the persistent appeal. The same human interest comes out in the parable of the unjust steward, who is commended for his worldly wisdom (xvi. 1-12). Jesus in the pages of Luke seems almost a humanist, and touches the Renaissance as well as the Reformation. Luke sees all with an artist's eye.

How thoroughly characteristic, again, is the sympathy with the reputed sinner, an unfailing trait of him who came into the world to save sinners; this is the gist of the little apologue of the Pharisee and

Publican in the Temple (xviii. 9-14) ; this is the *motif* of the story of Zacchæus the publican (xix. 1-10) ; and it is Luke alone that records the beautiful fact of the thief on the cross repenting and entering Paradise (xxiii. 39-43). Finally, as the crown of all these services which Luke has rendered to us, there is the narrative of the risen Lord meeting the two disciples, Cleopas and another, on the way to Emmaus. For pure beauty, that is, perhaps, the most remarkable passage in the New Testament. It is a series of pictures after the manner of the Pre-Raphaelites. There are the two disciples with gloomy countenances and troubled conversation ; there is the companion of the way, who joins them, and opens to them the Scriptures ; there is the turning into the inn at eventide ; there is the meal, the breaking of the bread, and the vanishing of the Lord.

Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked ? This is the triumph of literary skill. It is a prose poem. It brings home to the reader, as nothing else could, the union of the two worlds, the seen and the unseen, which was established in the person of Christ.

This brief survey of the distinctive contribution of Luke to the evangelic tradition leaves us with a clear impression of the eye and the mind which saw and recorded these things, things which otherwise the Church would have let slip. What an irreparable loss it would have been if we had not seen Jesus and heard him in the Pharisee's house, contrasting the Pharisee unfavourably with the woman of the city, or if we had not heard

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him develop his idea of charity in the case of the Good Samaritan, or if we had missed the parable of the Prodigal Son; the whole meaning and colour of Christianity would have been altered without the cry: "I will arise and go to my father," and without the father's welcoming embrace. Or if the publican's prayer had not been recorded, with the comment of Jesus on justification, or if that tender reassurance: "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise" had been forgotten, we should have been poorer by the loss of the hope which applies to the worst of sinners, and by the glimpse we get into the scene which immediately succeeds death. And if the journey to Emmaus had been wanting, a certain golden glow, like Perugino's atmosphere, would have been absent from the days of the resurrection.

That wide outlook of Jesus, himself the most loyal of Jews, that made Him love the loathed Samaritan, and therefore embraced the whole heathen world, was beyond the range of the twelve apostles in the days of his flesh. It needed Paul's "cloudless, boundless human view" to make the Master's thought intelligible; and then it needed Luke's re-writing and supplementing of the biography, to recover the priceless truth which was in danger of being overlooked.

Thus, like a good portrait-painter, Luke gave a conception of the Master which painters of more limited view could not have given. It is his portrait which has captivated the hearts of men, and given to the person of the Lord that luminous atmosphere, that

wide humanism, that note of serenity and joy, which were there, implied in records of word and deed, but were missed by writers with colder sympathies and narrower outlook.

It is Luke's picture of Jesus which seems to enforce the exhortation of Luke's master, Paul: "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks."

The same note appears in the second treatise which formed the natural sequel to the story of the life of the Master. And indeed the Gospel and the *Acts* should be bound together as two parts of the same work, if we would rightly picture Luke to our minds or adequately thank him for his inestimable service.



XVII

ACTS

A.D. 95





## CHAPTER XVII

ACTS

A.D. 95

THIS is a book of joy ; Renan even called it a new Homer. Its motto might well be : " The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul " (iv. 32). The tide of faith is advancing, and the six successive waves of advance are marked by a formula. The author pauses as the wave rolls in to mark progress. This rolling in of the tide may be presented in this way :

First wave.—The origin of the Church in Jerusalem, and its joyous expansion. " And the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly, and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith," ch. i.—vi. 7.

The second wave carries the Gospel to Samaria and over Palestine ; and then comes the rubric of progress : " So the church throughout all Judæa and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being edified ; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, was multiplied," ch. vi. 8—ix. 31.

The third wave advances to Syria and Antioch ; and the formula comes this time in the form : " But the word of God grew and multiplied," ch. ix. 32 —xii. 23.

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The fourth wave sweeps over Asia Minor, and the rubric runs : " So the Churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in number daily," ch. xii.25—xvi. 5.

The fifth wave goes over to Europe and occupies Macedonia and Achaia; and the note of triumph comes : " So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed," ch. xvi. 6—xix. 9.

Finally, the sixth wave reaches Rome, the capital of the world; and the great missionary is left there at the centre of things " preaching the Kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, with all boldness, none forbidding him," ch. xix. 21—xxviii. 31.

This pulsing of the waves of the tide, as they climb up the beach of the world, gives the reader the feeling that the book as a whole is the first chapter of a record which would continue until the world should be covered, as the waters cover the sea; for Christ would send his witnesses not only to Jerusalem, Judæa and Samaria, but " to the uttermost part of the earth " (i. 8).

It is then the book of the advancing tide which pours in, rejoicing and singing, to fulfil " a task of pure ablution round earth's human coasts." While it bears the title of *Acts of the Apostles*, it might with equal propriety be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit. " How much more shall He give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him " was the version of " good gifts " in the first treatise (Luke xi. 13). The second treatise begins to

show how that supreme gift is given in answer to united and believing prayer.

Hence the opening scene is the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost. A Jewish Midrash said that at Sinai, traditionally at the time of Pentecost, all the nations of the world heard God's voice in their own language.

This was the New Sinai ; here was to begin what the Midrash connected with the old Sinai. Judaism was becoming a missionary religion, though the Jews themselves were destined to be left out of it. In the streets of Jerusalem were gathered men from every country under heaven ; the story of Jesus, the gospel for the world, was to be carried by a succession of ordained witnesses to every land, in every language, by the gift of the one Spirit.

The rush of the movement, the arresting incidents, the crowd of persons that appear in the shifting scene, the fervour and uplift of the whole narrative, make one almost indifferent to questions of date and authorship. Indeed, we may be content to leave scholars still discussing these questions. But, to justify the place that the book is taking in the order here adopted, we must turn to the subject for a moment.

The "we" passages evidently come from the pen of that companion of Paul who wrote the Gospel, but an examination of the style of the rest of the book shows as clearly that the same writer wrote the whole, as a similar study shows that the writer is the author of the Gospel, viz. : Luke. Now the "we" passages must have been

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taken from a diary written at the time, and that would fix their date before A.D. 64, which is Jerome's date for the whole book. But certain events in Gamaliel's speech seem to rest on Josephus, whose work belongs to the years A.D. 80-94. We may conclude that Luke, after finishing his Gospel, set to work on the second treatise towards the end of the first century, and utilised his notes made when he was Paul's fellow-traveller. Those notes seemed to suggest the termination of his book. Perhaps he did not wish to describe Paul's imprisonment and death. It suited his rejoicing spirit to bring the story to an end where the Gospel had reached the capital of the empire, and was lodged there.

This account of the date and composition is not without its difficulties, but one thing is made clear : We have to do in *Acts* with a historical work, compiled from documents which were strictly contemporary. We can guess for example, that certain sections—ch. xi. 19-30, xii. 25—xv. 41—were derived from notes made by Titus. The compilation of the work is historical, in the ancient sense of the word. Exact chronology was not aimed at. Authorities were not cited. No attempt was made to reconcile discrepancies or to smooth out difficulties. Luke wrote as a historian, not claiming a supernatural guidance or a guarantee against errors. But Sir William Ramsay has made it clear, from strictly archæological evidence, that he is curiously accurate, often reflecting political and social conditions which were true of just the time to which he refers, but not before or after. We do him an

injustice; therefore, when we treat him as something less, or as something more, than a historian.

The difficulty just now referred to, lies in the fact that Luke shows no knowledge of Paul's letters. By the year A.D. 100 those letters were known and circulated as the *Apostolicon*. And it is impossible to explain why, for instance, Luke did not correct his account of Paul's journeys to Jerusalem by referring to an authentic document like *Galatians*, or why the "Council" at Jerusalem seems so difficult to fit in with Paul's procedure, as shown in his letters. Nor can we explain why Luke shows no susceptibility to Paul's theology. Christ is still for him the Messiah. The meaning of the Cross is only mentioned in Paul's accurately reported speech at Miletus.

But we must not lay too much stress on an argument from silence. For this book contains a warning in an instance not altogether dissimilar. From *Acts* alone you might infer that the author knew nothing about Jesus except his death. One saying of Jesus is quoted: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (xx. 35), but it is a saying not found in the Gospels. The Jesus he knew, it might be argued, was only that risen and invisible Jesus who had been made the Christ by his resurrection. But, fortunately for us, this same author had already written a full life of Jesus, containing all those priceless materials which we examined in the last chapter. His silence, therefore, about the life in *Acts* does not show that he was ignorant of it. Behind the history of the Spirit, and the work of

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Christ crucified and risen, was always presupposed the life lived on earth. And this silence of Luke in his second treatise, on what had been the whole substance of his first, is a useful reminder that Paul's own comparative omission of the earthly life of Jesus does not indicate that he was ignorant of it or underrated its importance.

The life of Jesus in its main outlines, as we know it from our Gospels, was the common property of all the first generation of Christians. It was evidently recounted in all preaching and taught in all assemblies. But evidently the amazing fact of the Resurrection, and the life of Christ continued by the Spirit in the Church, forming an absorbing and marvellous fact and series of events, threw the story of the earthly life, and even the teaching of Jesus, into the background.

(This book brings out vividly what constituted the impact of the Gospel on the world ; it was Jesus and the Resurrection, and the transforming and startling events which followed on faith in his name.) The sick were healed, and the recently dead were recalled to life, just as it had been in the work of Jesus himself. Signs and wonders were wrought by the hands of the Apostles. Men were completely converted ; the Spirit was manifested in powers of utterance and convincing demonstration of the truth of Jesus. This new and varied spiritual life seemed to be a fulfilment of Christ's promise that his disciples should in his name do greater works than he had done.

Let us look for a moment at the history as a whole.

The object was to show how the Christian Gospel gradually detached itself from Judaism. At first it had its seat in the Temple and showed no disposition to break with the old institutions. But driven by persecution from Jerusalem it showed that it had feet, and even wings, to travel over the world. The Council at Jerusalem represents the turning-point in the narrative ; the apostles recognise, though with hesitation and reserve, that the message is meant for the Gentiles.

The dragon-fly has shaken itself free from the chrysalis, and is spreading its iridescent wings in the sun ready for flight.

[ Then comes in the fact that the Roman government as a whole is surprisingly fair to the new movement, much more favourable, indeed, than the Jewish authorities. ) The Romans appear in a good light ; the march of the Gospel towards Rome seems encouraged by the general attitude of Roman officials. It is as if Luke, in a thoroughly Pauline spirit, were trying to show the political inoffensiveness of the new religion, in order to secure it a place as a *religio licita* in the empire (xiii. 12, xviii. 12, xix. 31).

From ch. xv. onward the whole interest centres in Paul, who, though a Jew, is a Roman citizen. The transition from Judaism to the universalism of the Empire is made in his person. A Hebrew of the Hebrews, a Pharisee, he was yet the preacher of the startling truth that a Gentile might become a Christian without being first a Jew, a position quite inconceivable



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to Peter and the other apostles, until their eyes were opened by the Spirit. He was anxious to show that he himself was a Jew, just as Wesley always maintained that he was a Churchman, even when his movement had broken entirely away from the Church. The great transition, taking place in his person, made his life a martyrdom. His attempt to keep the Judaism of the flesh, while he was superseding it by a Judaism of the Spirit, involved him in his arrest at Jerusalem, his imprisonment at Cæsarea, his appeal to Cæsar, and his transporting to Rome. The climax of the book is in his turning from his beloved people in Rome to the Gentiles. The die was cast, the change was accomplished ; Christianity was not to be a Jewish sect, but a religion for the world. This evolution of the new religion, to start on its victorious career in the Roman empire, was the dominant theme of Luke in the history as in the biography.

When we have obtained a view of the trend of the history as a whole, we can turn back to appreciate some of the details and characteristics of the work. What a gallery of portraits it is ; what a series of interesting episodes ; how we are swept along from end to end of that Mediterranean world. What Wesley's Journal is for the England of the eighteenth century, this little book is for the Roman empire at the dawn of our era. We see in swift succession the religious authorities at Jerusalem, Herod the King, the Chief Priest, the religious mountebank at Samaria, a high official from the Ethiopian court,



the Roman pro-consuls and pro-prætors in the several provinces, kings, soldiers, philosophers, charlatans, traders, seamen. We get the most vivid picture of a shipwreck, which lets us into the mysteries of the navigation of the Mediterranean, and gives us a graphic lesson in geography. We visit the great cities, Antioch, Athens, Corinth, Rome. We feel the stir of events. We find ourselves in the southern part of the Galatian Province, and only discover by accurate research how exactly true the picture is to the district just at that time. We are brought to Malta, and then by places which are still to be seen, across the Campagna to Rome. We get no glimpse of Nero, that monstrous autocrat of the world, but we are in his Prætorian Camp; we feel the strength, the order, the justice of the Imperial system at its centre, even when Nero wears the purple.

Then what a picture it is of the clash of religions in that eventful epoch; the pride of Judaism just before the Temple fell; the rustic faith in the gods in Southern Galatia, where a visit from Zeus and Hermes was quite a natural event, the Pythoness with her wild oracles at Philippi, her master's trading on her hallucination, the shrine makers of Diana at Ephesus, when their industry is imperilled by the new religion, the inimitable scene in Athens with its altar to the unknown god, and its dilettanti philosophers, all come before us, rich in life and significance. Renan's language is quite measured and exact: "It is, as the first leap forward of the Christian conscience, a book

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of joy, of serene ardour. Since the Homeric poems had never been a work full of such fresh sensations. A morning air, the smell of the sea, penetrates the book. It was the second poesy of Christianity, of which the sea of Galilee and its fisherboats had been the first."

Thus Luke, the artist, has endowed the *Acts of the Spirit* with the colour and air of romance. For very plainly the whole book is the record of the Holy Spirit's work. "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance" (ii. 4). "How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?"—the Spirit made the new community (v. 9). "And we are witnesses of these things and so is the Holy Spirit whom God hath given to them that obey Him" (v. 32). "He being full of the Holy Spirit looked up . . . and saw Jesus" (vii. 55). "Peter and John prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit . . . and they received the Holy Spirit" (viii. 15). "The Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip" (viii. 39). "While Peter spake the Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard" (x. 44). "The Spirit bade me go with them, making no distinction . . . I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said: 'John indeed baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit'" (xi. 12-16). "Agabus signified by the Spirit that there should be a great famine . . . which came to pass" (xi. 28). "The Holy Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul" (xiii. 2). "It seemed good

to the Holy Spirit and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things " (xv. 28). " Forbidden of the Holy Spirit to speak the Word in Asia . . . the Spirit of Jesus suffered them not " (xvi. 6-7). " he said, Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed ? " (xix. 2). " When Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them " (xix. 6). " Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops " (xx. 28). " Thus saith the Holy Spirit " (xxi. 11).

It is this story of the Holy Spirit that is invested with an air of romance, so that a suggestion involuntarily comes, that of romance, and all that element in life, which redeems us from the humdrum and the commonplace, the Holy Spirit is the cause.

When the Holy Spirit is not recognised the world and life become drab and dreary. But if we would preserve freshness and joy in life, the one thing needful is to recognise the Divine Worker, and not only the Creator and Preserver of the material world, but that Spirit who pervades all things, and while maintaining the natural order, frequently and naturally transcends it, in response to faith and prayer, the Spirit who brought Jesus into the world and came upon him, not in measure, so that all who believe in him might also receive the Spirit.

It is this that makes the romance of missions. The Spirit's presence and work, as Luke has taught us, are a romance.



XVIII

THE APOCALYPSE OF JOHN

A.D. 96



## CHAPTER XVIII

THE APOCALYPSE OF JOHN

A.D. 96

WHAT a book this is ! It thrills us with the suggestion of unknown modes of being. It opens before us vistas of terror and glory. There is a voice in it like the sound of many waters ; there is a vision of a city descending out of heaven, to be the hope of the earth.

It has the effect upon us of great poetry, or, rather, it affects those who are not moved by Dante or Milton with many of the feelings which the *Divina Comedia* or *Paradise Lost* produce in the literary mind. It takes the place of poetry for many in Christendom, the dim toiling masses, the persecuted, the afflicted. These do not notice grammatical or syntactical blunders ; they are like the famous emperor *super grammaticam* ; they are only conscious of the splendid or lurid imagery ; they feel the rush of ideas and events which blend two worlds and bring the future near to the present.

Like the writings of George Fox and Jacob Behmen, and most of the mystics, this book owes its music not to the words or to the construction of the sentences, but to the imaginative atmosphere, the crash of doom, the passing of dynasties, the dread peal of the trumpet.

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Great things marshal themselves before the mind. The end appears, and the intermediate centuries shrink to moments. It is as if Time itself were rolling up and passing away, and the achievement of its purpose were revealed.

Possibly the untrained reader, even more than the scholar, finds this book to his taste. The scholar is exercised by questions of the authorship, the origin, the interpretation of the several parts, and the difficulty of solving those problems cools his spiritual ardour ; while the ordinary reader simply loses himself in the imagery and the rush of wings which seems to pulsate through the book.

After every critical study I arise and read again. The spell is quickly cast upon me. I am awed, inspired, corrected, encouraged. It does its work, as it has done from the beginning.

If you adopt this method of constantly recurring to the poem, as it stands, and never allow the direct and obvious appeal of the book to elude you, the light, the help, the interpretation, which a patient scholarship brings, may be of value. The glory of the harvest moon is not lost because you have taken a course of selenography. But the most careful study of those exhausted craters, the discovery that there is no atmosphere on the satellite, the calculation of the moon's influence on the tides, in a word, all the science of the moon, will not take the place of that soft, bewitching light, which on sea or shore, burning through the branches of the pines, or filling antique



ruins with romance, has been to you from childhood upwards the revelation, or suggestion, of the light which never was on sea or shore.

Let it be understood that the facts which critical science and scholarship may bring to light are by no means to diminish the fresh inspiration, the moving, though obscure, message of the book.

1. The first astonishing thing to note is that this is an example of a branch of literature quite common in Judaism, which has been called *apocalyptic*. Our unique Apocalypse is unique not in kind, but in quality. In the Old Testament Isaiah xxxiii., xxiv.—xxvii., xxxiv.—xxxv. form an apocalypse. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and, above all Daniel, contain matter of the same sort. See for example, Jeremiah xxxiii. 14–26.

Seven Jewish apocalypses have come down to us, besides fragments and notices of others. We have the Book of Enoch, the Assumption of Moses, the Book of Jubilees, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, the Psalms of Solomon, the Apocalypse of Baruch, and lastly iv. Esdras, which belongs to the same period as our Apocalypse. In all these works there is a dominant thought. Visions, symbols, events partly passing and partly coming, are marshalled to breathe courage into the people of God *under persecution*. That is the *motif* of the Apocalypse of John. Everything is said to strengthen the saints who under the hand of the tyrant might become apostates from the Lord.

The student who engages in a comparative study of

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these apocalypses is more and more struck by the points in common: for instance, the idea of the Millennium occurs in the Slavonic Enoch, but he becomes more and more impressed with the Christian Apocalypse, the difference of its spirit, the uniqueness of its message. (As *Genesis* took the Babylonian mythology and made it monotheistic, this seer took the Jewish Apocalyptic and made it Christian.)

To the first century this Christian Apocalypse was of more value than Christian prophecy. It carried the persecuted saints of Christ through the period of the persecutions by which the Roman Empire endeavoured to crush the Church and thwart the Kingdom of God.

2. The second point of interest is the evidence we have to determine the author and the date of the work. The date is plainer than the authorship. The name of the author is affixed, John, the Theologian; but to identify this seer with John the Apostle was guess-work, which is devoid of all verification. One passage alone makes it too improbable to be entertained in the absence of all corroboration. The reference to the "twelve apostles of the Lamb" in ch. xxi. 14 shows that the seer regards them as an august company belonging to the first age, and certainly could not have thought himself to be in their number.

The book may include sources of different dates; it is "full of flakes from all that is greatest in preceding literature," says Dr. Moffat. The passage about Nero Redivivus, the Beast that was slain, but was to return,

goes back to A.D. 68. But it is Domitian's claim to be worshipped as a god that gives the plangent note to the book. That brings us to A.D. 96. In the persecution of Domitian sounds the triumph note of Christ.

3. The contents of the book are difficult to arrange, and the theology is difficult to characterise, because a crude Judaism lies side by side with ripe Christian truth, a fact which gave rise to the ingenious but improbable suggestion that the author took a Jewish Apocalypse which was to hand and worked it over into a Christian book. The improbability of this theory arises from this, that it leaves unexplained and inexplicable the inimitable freshness and vitality of the whole composition, and it reduces to the rank of a mere literary device what is in reality a vision, or a series of visions, an experience which the writer himself felt had not been invented by him, but had come to him. Nothing should be more certain to the reader than the inspiration which breathes through the whole. Whether we can identify references, interpret symbols, read the past and foretell the future from the book, or not, an overwhelming spiritual impression is made. A divine voice is sounding. Warning, rebuke, encouragement, promises of victory and reward come from One who is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the Risen Christ, revealing himself to his faithful servants as none other than God.

We may construct a plan which enables us to see

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the book as a whole and to apprehend the relation of the several parts, without siding with any of those methods of interpretation which have thrown students of the book into opposing camps.

First, there is a *Prologue*, which consists of messages from the Risen Lord to the Seven Churches of Asia. "They lie along the hills and across the plain of Lydia," wrote Ruskin,\* "sweeping in one wide curve like a flight of birds or a swirl of cloud, all of them either in Lydia itself or on the frontier of it; in nature Lydian all—richest in gold, delicatest in luxury, softest in music, tenderest in art—of the world. They unite the capacities and felicities of the Asiatic and the Greek. Had the last message of Christ been given to the Churches in Greece, it would have been to Europe in imperfect age; if to the Churches in Syria, to Asia in imperfect age. Written to Lydia it is written to the world and for ever."

Thus we may suppose that the Prologue directs the subsequent visions, not to local churches, or past occasions, but to the Church as a whole, and to all time. Though the form is local and temporal, seeming to imply that the end was at hand, like Christ's own words in the Gospels, the message is raised above all local incidents, and escapes the trammels of time, to look into eternity.

Then we are transported to heaven, where we see a throne, with the Almighty upon it, and the Trisagion always proceeding, and a Sealed Book which no one

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\* *Fors Clavigera* (vii. 402).

could open until the Lion-Lamb—the symbol of Christ—from whom proceed the seven spirits of God, prevailed to open it. (iv. 1—viii. 1) The *seven seals* are broken one after another ; after the breaking of the sixth there is an intermezzo, for the sealing of 144,000 out of the twelve tribes of Israel.

↳ The opening of the seals represents the unloosing of the powers which work out the redemption of Christ in the world.) As in a week of creative power, under varied symbolism, the triumph of the Lamb is seen, the ransomed are gathered around him in heaven for eternal felicity. And then there is “silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.”

Following on the breaking of the seven seals, *seven trumpets* are sounded successively. ↳ They are trumpets of doom.) Woe is denounced on the earth. After the central trumpet an eagle flies through heaven, announcing the terror of the remaining trumpets. There is an appalling outbreak of wickedness, led by Apollyon. All the plagues that ever tormented men are let loose on the guilty earth. Then a strong angel comes down with a little book, which the seer eats ; there are seven thunders, there is to be a long period of travail ; two witnesses prophesying for 1,260 days, or forty-two months, are at last slain.

But with the sounding of the seventh trumpet we are again in the midst of the final triumph of the redeemed (viii. 2—xi. 19).

Then there is the strange drama of the Woman and the Child, pursued by the Dragon ; the woman is left in

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the wilderness for 1,260 days, but the child is caught up to heaven.

Then follows war in heaven between Michael and the Dragon. The defeated Dragon is on the shore of the sea, and in the west emerge a series of beasts, one of which is identified by the cryptic number 666 (Neron Keisar?). Then the beast is vanquished, and the scene of victory in heaven again opens. Angel after angel announces the glorious progress of events, until the vintage of the earth is gathered.

Then, following on the seven seals and the seven trumpets are *seven vials*, which contain the seven last plagues, and seven angels empty them successively on the earth. The catastrophe of the earth is described: "Every island fled away, and the mountains were not found" (chs. xv. xvi.).

Then follows the terrific doom of Babylon, represented as a woman with *seven heads* and ten horns; evidently this is Rome with her first ten Cæsars; the blasphemy of the Cæsar's claim to be God, the murder of the saints, is punished by irretrievable destruction.

In contrast with this sinister Power appears issuing out of heaven the Word of God, the KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

The dragon is cast into the pit for a thousand years, and ultimately is bound there for ever and ever (xvii.-xx. 10).

Then follows the gorgeous scene of the end. The white throne is set, and the world's judgment is accomplished. There is a new heaven and a new

earth. The very angel who poured out the seventh vial of wrath now shows the seer the glorious heavenly city coming down to the earth—the wife of the Lamb—immaculate, beautiful, indwelt by the living God—the ideal life for which men dreamed and suffered and died, at last realised upon earth (xx. 11–xxii. 5).

An *epilogue* consists of a dialogue between the seer and an angel. The vision splendid, with its fuliginous glories, and its shocks of doom, becomes calm and still like a summer sunset over the sea. The drama has worked itself out through woes, and heroisms, and the conflict of ghostly forces, to a rapturous and divine end. We understand that the earth, all its kingdoms and powers, have become the kingdom of the Lord and of His Christ.

True to the spirit of that Jewish apocalyptic to which the book belongs, it is a vision of practical encouragement to the persecuted saints, an assurance of the victory of Christ in the days when the forces of the world, and especially the Roman Empire, which filled the horizon at that time, seemed engaged in a triumphant effort to crush out the Church.

With a plethora of imagery drawn from the older books, and from the circumstances of his own time, this seer of Patmos, exiled for the testimony of Jesus, brings home to mind and heart the conviction that the Lamb upon the throne will ultimately possess the earth, and all the powers that oppose him, human and super-human, will be defeated, destroyed or bound in the eternal prison-house.



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It is a book of Christianised Judaism, so Jewish in form that it suggested the idea of Jewish origin, so intensely and passionately Christian in spirit that it presents the vision of a Judaism converted to Christianity.

What is the theology of this singular book? What light does it shed on the beliefs of the Church at the end of the first century? *God* is the God of Jewish monotheism, representing holiness rather than love. *Christ* is the Son of Man of the synoptic Gospels (e.g., in ch. iii. 12 he says, "my God"), but the limitations of his earthly life are removed. He holds the foremost place in creation. In human history he is supreme. He opens all the seals. He has the prerogatives and titles of God. He shares the throne. The divine claim to be Alpha and Omega, Beginning and End, is in his mouth. This John equals even Paul and the Fourth Gospel in his realisation of the unbounded power of the exalted Christ. The *Spirit* is one in the variety of sevenfold gifts. Thus the *Trinity* appears in the opening passage: "Grace and peace from Him which is and which was and which is to come, and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ" (i. 4, 5; cf. v. 6). The phrase "seven spirits of God" reminds us how dangerous it is to press numbers in the attempt to understand the Trinity. As the Spirit of God is one, but sevenfold, so God is one though threefold.

The *Church* is still "all the churches," as in the books we have examined, but the unity of it is implied in the various symbols used. The number 144,000 is



no doubt a symbol of the Church, as the new Israel. The woman in the wilderness, of ch. xii. stands for the Church. And most distinct of all, as proving the unity, the Church is the Lamb's wife.

*Salvation* in this book is always ascribed to the sacrifice, or blood, of the Lamb. He "loosed us from our sins by his blood" (i. 5). He "purchased men unto God with his blood" (v. 9). "They washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (vii. 14). "They overcame because of the blood of the Lamb" (xii. 11). Yet works are more emphasised than faith. They are alluded to twenty-two times for the four times that faith is mentioned. This carries us to the opposite pole from Paul, and nearer to James.

*Angelology*.—Angels, part of the Apocalyptic apparatus, play a far larger part in this than in any other New Testament book. But it is noticeable how restrained and free from extravagance the presentation of the angels is. They are symbolic figures representing the relation between men and God.

The *Eschatology* is that of the earliest New Testament books. The coming of Christ was expected soon, and following at once on his coming would be the new era. The idea that Satan would be bound for a thousand years, and that after the Millennium would be a fresh outbreak of his malignity before the final victory, was, as we saw, in the Slavonic Epoch (A.D. 1-50), and should not be unduly pressed, as it is not found in any other book of the New Testament.

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Thus the theology is not an advance on the earlier books, does not, indeed, carry us so far as the later epistles of Paul ; but the one great truth of the book—its prophecy, its revelation—is that the end of this world-order, and of human history, will be the enthronement of Jesus, and his absolute sway over all peoples and tongues.

We still need this sublime reassurance. The power of the world, like the Roman Empire which has at last passed away, except so far as it survives in the Roman See, tries to destroy the Church, and to crucify the Son of God afresh. But the fiercer the persecution, the more cruel the stress, so much the more, from the furnace of persecution and affliction, shoots up the flame of unearthly confidence, that Jesus shall reign. All kingdoms, tribes, races, languages, will acknowledge Him. His accomplished kingdom will finally subdue all the resistance and rebellion, the hatred and hostility which the world manifests to Him. He will reign while the earth endures, and even when, in due course, the heavens have passed away like a scroll.

The imagery of the book, which belongs, like Dante and Milton, to poetry, is susceptible of so many interpretations that it would be foolish to claim for any one view an accepted authority. Rather the reader, the student, the saint, are called to brood upon these scenes, to bring whatever help archæology or history can offer, and to interpret things in the light of the Spirit. Sir W. Ramsay's book on the letters to the Seven Churches, and Christina Rossetti's

mystical interpretation of the apocalypse, are equally legitimate. Every fresh and earnest study reveals new wonders and new truth, although no one has been able to extract from the visions an exact forecast of the future, or even to show whether it is the past or the future that is described under the several images.

The suggestion that follows is only tentative.

The *Seven Seals* represent the gradual unfolding of the plan of God from the foundation of the world. Jesus alone can explain it.

1. Jehovah reigning, the creation of man (Gen. i., ii.).
2. The bloodshed of human history, from the blood of Abel downward.
3. The principle of commerce, scarcity, anxiety for a livelihood.
4. Death and Hades at work in the world.
5. The saints, the *Chesidim*, beneath the altar, the Holy Land, crying out, "How long?"
6. A little apocalypse, which represents the era of the apocalyptic literature. Then ch. vii. represents the merging of the two dispensations, the twelve thousand from each of the twelve tribes represent the whole body of the saints gathered by the sacrifice of the Lamb.
7. The old dispensation is over. The half hour's silence in heaven represents the pause which imagination pictures between B.C. and A.D.

Following this plan, we may regard the Seven Trumpets as describing the disturbances which accompany the introduction of Christianity. The interlude

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between the sixth and seventh trumpets shows the finishing of the mystery of God and the fall of the Temple. With the seventh trumpet comes the triumph of Christ and the new Temple in heaven.

Then the sketch of the early empire is given as the foreground beyond which comes the judgment, and the establishment on earth of the new City of God.

Thus in a way, in fold upon fold, not without much repetition and going back on past traces, the Apocalypse presents in outline the history of man on the earth from the beginning to the end.

Considering the spiritual power in the book and the revealing effect of the imagery, which, however inscrutable, impresses the reader with the sense of the unknown modes of being, and the hidden forces, which are at work in the affairs of men, we do well to treat the whole work as a *revelation*. That is to say, we are not to suppose a writer painfully piecing together a cento of apocalyptic passages; but we are to realise a *seer*, an earnest, suffering, passionate, poetical soul, which in the solitude of Patmos, and watching the shifting glories of the Ægean Sea and the splendours of heaven, actually *sees* before his eyes, or, at least, the spiritual eyes, these visions of conflict and glory. He writes down what he sees, not all at one time, but in vision after vision. He cannot explain all he sees, nor is he able to show exactly where the visions overlap. The impression which his message makes on the reader is due to the fact, however we may explain it, that Christ is, through this His servant, actually

addressing the Church for all time, and making known to us the things which, in any case, must "shortly come to pass."

This is the explanation of the solemn warning in ch. xxii. 18, 19.



XIX

JOHN

A.D. 100





## CHAPTER XIX

JOHN

A.D. 100

THE object of the Fourth Gospel is stated in the words :  
“ These are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God ; and that believing ye may have life in his name ” (xx. 31). Belief and life, a belief which gives life, a life which consists in belief, a life of faith in Christ, the Son of God—that the reader may receive this life, and live it, is the purpose steadily held in view.

Notwithstanding its apparently speculative tone, and its atmosphere of translucent mysticism, it is the most practical of writings ; it is a sermon which aims at gripping the hearer and declines to let him go until he has settled the point whether he will believe or no.

This object has been achieved all along. Uncounted numbers of human souls, like Louis Harms, or the Japanese Joseph Neesima, have, after searching and struggling, entered into life through reading this book. Its miraculous working is always manifest, because it is always possible to find people, and those often the most devoted and effectual Christians, who were born again by means of this brief, life-giving tract.

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The practical result, which the book has always avowed, is at present in Protestant Christendom hindered by the critical discussions of the date and authorship. Criticism raises a dust of controversy, in which the clear outlines and the direct appeal are for the moment lost. It is more difficult for readers to let the writer speak undisturbed, to listen open-minded to the tale that is told, to admit the effect which it legitimately produces.

The unfailing tradition from the very earliest times that the author was John, the son of Zebedee, who appears again and again in the Synoptic Gospels, naturally led preachers and writers to quote what is written as the evidence coming from the beloved disciple of Jesus, until the value of the book seemed to depend on the authorship. Under the commanding influence of the apostolic name the statements and arguments of the book were placed beyond the reach of criticism. Reverent students did not even venture to institute a comparison between the fourth and the other three gospels; all that was attempted was a Harmony, *i.e.* a laborious attempt to fit in the two very diverse groups of material, and to make one smooth and consistent narrative of the whole.

Tatian's *Diatessaron*, which at the end of last century for the first time came to light, shows what was the traditional way of handling the gospels from the second to the beginning of the nineteenth century. The narrative was fourfold, as there are four points of the compass. That was the thought of Irenæus. The

four evangelists, typified by the Lion, the Ox, the Man, and the Eagle, were part of an inevitable order. John was the Eagle, the soaring spirit, that having lain in the bosom of Jesus was best able to interpret His thoughts.

He best the mind of Christ reveals  
Who lies like John upon his breast.

It is small wonder then that when criticism ventured to question the traditional authorship and date, and when comparing the fourth gospel with the other three it treated the three as historical and the fourth as a late speculation, a recasting of the story of Jesus, with a tendency, in order to defend certain theological conceptions, the old simple acceptance of the work was disturbed. The book which has been the main instrument in bringing people to faith in Christ was discredited as of less value than the plain memoirs of the Synoptists. John Stuart Mill, for instance, could appreciate the latter, and said that a good rule of life would be so to act as that your conduct would win the approval of Jesus of Nazareth, but he found the fourth gospel merely tiresome, a figment of an ingenious brain.

It is well therefore to shake ourselves free from an illusion, though it be of a hoary antiquity, and to recognise that the book does not claim to be written by John, the son of Zebedee. Nowhere does John step out of the canvas, as Paul does in his letters, and demand attention on the ground that he had been the intimate of Jesus.

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Evidently, therefore, the value of the book cannot rest on the tradition that John the son of Zebedee was its author.

In the same way the historical accuracy of detail cannot be the cause of the influence which the book exercises, for in this book facts are related quite ostensibly as the framework in which to set ideas, truths, religious forces. For example, the truth that God is Spirit, does not depend on the conversation with the Samaritan woman, though it is propounded in that setting; nor does the nature and necessity of the New Birth depend on the interview with Nicodemus in which it is revealed.

(The influence of the book is produced by a spiritual, rather than a historical truth which exhales from its pages.) The facts may or may not be correctly stated, but the words "are spirit and they are life."

It was Irenæus who confused the John of the fourth gospel with John the Theologue, who wrote the Apocalypse; but it was the undeviating judgment of antiquity that John who wrote the fourth gospel, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was John, the son of Zebedee.

As we shall see in a moment, that unbroken tradition rests on a very solid argument, and it is quite possible that the pendulum will swing, and in a short time the authorship of the gospel will again be undisputed. But we must never lose this result of a century of criticism: (The value of this book does not depend on its authorship, nor on its historicity.) Whoever wrote

it, the tale it tells will go home to the open-minded reader; though it should add nothing material to the historic facts of the Synoptists, the spiritual addition that it makes is indispensable. Beyond all question the book presupposes the historical person of Jesus; it never could have been conceived unless Jesus had lived, and unless the memoirs of his life had been familiar to the author; but the whole aim of the author is to set the life in a certain light, to relate it with the universe and with humanity in a saving way. He offers all along an interpretation. The Synoptists were content to chronicle the facts of Christ's life. But this author is not content with that, does not even feel the necessity of doing that; his purpose is to challenge the reader to believe in Christ, to respond to him personally, to be born again, transformed, spiritually renewed, by a direct union with Christ.

As to the date, early tradition represented John as an old man at Ephesus, writing this gospel about A.D. 100 when he himself was nearly a hundred years old. Another line of tradition represents John as martyred like his brother James; if he wrote the gospel, therefore, it was written earlier.

All we need say is that it was written before A.D. 130 when references to it become clear and abundant. The influence and value of the book do not in the least depend on the date. If it had been written in the twentieth century and came out for the first time, like Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali*, it would have the same effect now as it has had all along. That

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effect has nothing to do with date or authorship ; it is intrinsic and indefeasible.

At the same time, as Professor Agar Beet showed in the *Expository Times* (Vol. XXIII. 449), the evidence for the authorship of John the son of Zebedee is precisely as strong as it ever was, perhaps stronger. There is a profound harmony between this gospel and the writings of Paul, in their presentation of the message of Christ, as contrasted with the teaching in the Synoptics.

These two writers, Paul and John, are two witnesses to a side of Christ's teaching, and a significance of Christ's person, to which the more objective narratives of the life give but passing allusions. And as Paul was the exact contemporary of Jesus, this John was most likely his contemporary, and his close companion, as the tradition always declared. This is the nature of the evidence : in the Synoptists there are two pairs of brothers, Andrew and Peter, James and John, prominent among the twelve. Peter is first, as also in Acts, where he is often associated with John (Acts iii. 1, 3, 4, II, iv. 13, 19, viii. 14), and where the death of James is narrated (xii. 2.) The remarkable thing is that in this fourth gospel, we never find the names of John or James, and there is only a casual mention of " the sons of Zebedee " in ch. xxi. 2, but a " disciple whom Jesus loved " is repeatedly mentioned (xiii. 23, xix. 26, xx. 2, xxi. 7, 10,) closely associated with Peter. This disciple, we suppose, was the one known to the high priest (xviii. 15, 16,) as he was certainly the one to whom Christ on the Cross committed his mother.

Who was this disciple? The only answer is found in the tradition that it was John the son of Zebedee, who modestly concealed his own name and that of his brother James, even when narrating incidents in which they took part. If John who wrote the Gospel was John the Apostle of the Lord, we understand the fundamental agreement between Paul and John, for Paul had intercourse with John (Gal. ii. 9,) and would learn from him that inwardness of Jesus which only appeared in the biography of Jesus when John long years after undertook to re-write the story.

But we scrupulously abstain from dragging the author out of his self-chosen obscurity. We read the book with unprejudiced eyes, not finding its value any more in the fact that it was written by John the son of Zebedee, but no longer disturbed, or distracted in our appreciation by the fact that the tradition is called in question.

⌋ Here is a work which stands on its own merits, and makes its own appeal, a voice from the first century after the Crucifixion, which commends Christ to us, and draws us to him. How does it produce the belief and life which it has in view? First of all, glance at its relation to the three earlier gospels. It is as if the writer had Mark before him, and referred the reader to that familiar source for details, and yet it is as if he wished incidentally and unostentatiously to correct some unimportant mistakes which occurred in the current narrative. He shows that Jesus was crucified the day before the Paschal Offering; the tradition that



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the Last Supper was the Paschal feast is corrected ; Jesus himself was offered in the afternoon, and the Paschal lambs were slain in the evening of the same day. He shows that Jesus was in Jerusalem, and cleansed the Temple, at the beginning of his ministry, while the Synoptic narrative, not knowing of that early work in Jerusalem, placed the cleansing of the Temple at the end. Mark only had the vague tradition of the call of Simon and Andrew together (i. 16, 17.) This author has a beautiful account of Andrew called from the circle of John the Baptist and finding his brother Peter, and bringing him to Jesus (John i. 40-42) and he declares that the name Rock was given to Peter there at the beginning.

But the great contrast with the Synoptists lies, partly in another style of language, which pervades the whole book, and is the same, whether the writer is speaking himself, or reporting the words of Jesus ; and partly in the intrusion of several new elements, some of which we can trace, *e.g.* Paul, Philo, and contemporary stoicism have come in, and the life of Jesus is presented as the life of the Logos, the Eternal Word of God, incarnate in that unique Person, and so effecting an entrance into all who believe in him. This is a philosophy of Christianity, which gave an opening to the Gnosis, which took so strange a course in the gnostics of the second and third centuries. The effect of this handling is that the life of Jesus is set before us as the life of an indwelling Christ, not so much a life lived once for all within the limits of the few years of



( a human life, but a life produced for ever in all those who unfeignedly believe.

The materials employed to produce this effect might be rearranged like the pictures in a gallery ; but here they are arranged in such a way that the book is a compact and articulated whole.

It may be conceived under the image of a great Cathedral—Lincoln for example—and so conceived it produces upon the mind a unified effect.

The Prologue, which Beausobre described to Frederick the Great as the most wonderful utterance that ever came from a human mind, is like the façade of that stately pile. It should be written in letters of gold, said St. Augustine. It is the prologue in heaven, the view of things which alone explains human life. In a sense it is the entrance to the gospel narrative which follows ; but like the façade of Lincoln it is not in close relation to the rest of the structure ; it is loftier, it suggests much more than the gospel deals with. "In the beginning" yes, it dares to go where science is unable to pierce. It starts long before history, and then swoops down suddenly on the plane of history to state how John came as a witness, and then how the Word came in the flesh, to whom he bore witness.

This is the sublime entrance into a unique building. These eighteen verses give the sweep of the creative thought of God, and show as in a flash of glory the place that the story of the Synoptists takes in the divine plan.

Then we enter the nave. The baptistry, as it were,

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is at the entrance (i. 19-34). After John's testimony and the call of the first disciples, the new religion is under way. The story hovers between Judæa and Galilee. We pass to Cana and Capernaum, and the healing of the nobleman's servant; we are back in Jerusalem with Nicodemus; we halt by the well with the woman of Samaria.

There are two controversies with the Jews, one on the Sabbath, another on the Bread of Life, arising out of a meal given in a desert place to a multitude on its way to Jerusalem.

This section culminates in the confession of the twelve disciples through the mouth of Peter (vi. 69).

The twelve are represented on either hand along the aisles of the nave, as Thorwaldsen has represented them in the Cathedral of Trondheim, and at the end is Jesus with His outspread arms, and the invitation: "Come unto me."

Then comes the centre of the Church with its two transepts (vii-xii). The scene is now in Judæa though the two retreats beyond Jordan (x. 40, xi. 54), suggest the transepts. There is a conflict with Judaism at the joyous feast of Tabernacles. Then a blind man is healed, suggesting how Jesus is the Light of the World (ch. ix.).

Then comes the Winter Feast of the Dedication, and finally the events which centre in Bethany, including the type of the Resurrection in the raising of Lazarus.

We now enter the Chancel of the Church (ch. xiii-xvii), where a soft light broods over the scene, like a

sunny afternoon after a stormy morning, and before a lurid sunset. In this hallowed atmosphere Jesus gathers His disciples at the Communion Table, and confirms their faith in an act of lowly love, in the expulsion of the traitor, (in the greatest discourse that ever fell from human lips, and the holiest prayer that ever rose from earth to heaven. This chancel is built by the fourth evangelist alone. The others gave the bare fact of the Supper, but here in mellow light, and ending in a hymn of praise, the whole meaning of the Supper is serenely deployed before worshipping eyes.)

At the end of the Chancel is the Cross, and Christ upon it (ch. xviii-xx). The trial, and execution of the monstrous sentence are described in great detail, supplementing in a peculiarly rich way what was contained in the Synoptic tradition. Then the whole scene is lighted up with the glory of the Resurrection, and the three appearances to Mary, to the Ten, and to the Eleven, with the commission given to them to carry on the work of saving the world from its sins.

The epilogue is like the Galilee Chapel in Durham Cathedral. The bereaved disciples have gone back to their fishing on the Galilean lake, and Jesus meets them there, to call Peter to his special work, and to indicate that the "disciple whom Jesus loved," the one that "wrote these things" would tarry till Jesus came. In the light of the events we understand this to mean that the fourth gospel will be the most vital

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and life-giving witness to Jesus until he himself comes.

This it has certainly proved to be.

(In this mysteriously beautiful edifice, a spiritual structure to which there is no parallel in literature, or in religion, Jesus meets us.) The Jesus who meets us is still the man of Galilee, thoroughly human, a man among men, weary, suffering, contradicted, opposed, put to death. But we find in him throughout the Eternal Reason, the Logos, or Word of God, the Bread from Heaven, the Living Water, the Vine of God bearing human branches, the inner principle of life and service.

He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, by which we come to God. And thus, while in the other gospels we know Christ after the flesh, in this gospel we know him after the Spirit. He comes to us plainly out of Heaven, out of the bosom of God, with the express purpose to take us, if we will, into the bosom of God, to Heaven.

Misunderstandings that cling to the earlier narratives are cleared away. The earlier narratives are presupposed, but they are transferred out of the realm of history into that of religion. The miracles are not merely, as they seemed at first, acts of humanity, but symbols of spiritual blessings. The Resurrection is not so much an event of long ago, or an event of an uncertain future, but an immediate experience for those who believe in Christ. Forthwith they *have* eternal life. (The *Parousia* is not postponed; it

comes at once, for the Paraclete is the immediate return of Christ to all his own, the fulfilment of his promise to be with them always unto the end.

Thus in a remarkable way which would have been inconceivable unless this fourth gospel had been written, the fact of Christ is brought into an inward and spiritual experience, which, whatever might be the ultimate goal, in the Resurrection and the Parousia and the judgment, secured the continuous life of Christ in the hearts of men. This is what makes the story so effective and practical. The reader, if he is willing, is brought into contact with Christ, as an eternal, omnipresent reality, who is at once the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world, and the Vine of God, in whom human souls engrafted bear much fruit.

(While it is more mystical than the other gospels it is also more practical.) The others show us Christ, but this brings us to him. All the evangelism of Paul has crept into this late editing of the Life of the Master.

All is written that we may believe, and that believing we may have life.

In view of this practical value of the book we may be content to relegate to a secondary place those numerous questions which occupy the critics. It is of minor importance who wrote it and when it was written, if, beyond all question, it actually brings us to Christ and makes us partakers of the Eternal Life.



XX

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

A.D. 105





## CHAPTER XX

### THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN A.D. 105

THE epistle does not mention the writer, nor those to whom it is sent. No date is attached. No circumstances are stated. The little treatise, therefore, is not like the other letters in the New Testament, nor even like ii. and iii. John; for each of these smaller letters avows itself as coming from "The Elder" to a specified correspondent, and closes with the salutation customary in ancient letters. But here the writer is silent about himself, and addresses his readers, not as special individuals, but as "little children," or as "brethren," but evidently under these general names he includes "fathers" and "young men" (ii. 12-14). There are no salutations, because there is no one to receive them or to pass them on.

It is what we should call an "open letter," arising out of a certain situation, which we have to conjecture from the letter itself. But unusual as is the form, like *Hebrews*, to which in form it bears the closest resemblance, it has an indispensable place in the Christian revelation. Moreover, it has that quality of great literature, universality, which makes it as pertinent

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and serviceable in the twentieth as it was in the second century when it was written.

The reader who meditates as he reads soon begins to see vaguely the conditions out of which it grew ; and no one can easily miss its application to our own time. It is a curiously inward work, and homogeneous with the Fourth Gospel. And if we choose to believe that it was written by John the son of Zebedee in old age, there is no external evidence to dispute it ; on the contrary, it has been ascribed to him from the earliest times. If the gospel is his, the epistle may be ; but it is well not to weaken the value of the work by idle discussions about the authorship, which, in the absence of any internal claim, must be regarded as unimportant. " That which we have seen and heard " of i. 3 might be the language of a disciple who beheld and handled the Word made flesh. But it might also be the language of one who had enjoyed the spiritual experience which is described in the book ; the theme is not, as in the gospel, the story of Jesus, but the Christian life as it is lived by the children of God who have reached that status in Christ.

The writer, whoever he was, moves, a serene and illuminated spirit, among the confusions and conflicts of his time, ruminating the great realities of the Christian revelation, in which he finds the solution of all problems. His words drop like minute-guns which arrest attention and provoke thought.

There is only one satisfactory way to use the book ; that is to brood over it and let it speak its message.

Amazing vistas open up from almost every verse ; connections and interpretations reveal themselves ; warmth and light are imparted ; a spiritual life is nurtured or begun ; in a word, you will nowhere find a writing which more deserves the name "inspired." Nowhere in so brief a space are so lofty themes handled satisfactorily.

"We have seen and heard," "we know," "we love," these are the watchwords throughout. A calm certainty and a glowing charity pervade the composition. If one lighted upon the brief tractate by accident, and resolved to make it a bosom-companion as a guide of life, the result would be a genuine Christianity. All things that pertain to life and godliness are here expressed succinctly. It is a book not to discuss but to read, to mark, to learn, inwardly to digest.

Critical questions and disturbing controversies may therefore be very fitly left on one side, while we gaze stedfastly at the situation which elicited the book. Similar situations recur ; indeed, in the struggle after a New Theology and in the activity of Theosophy we have such a situation before us at the present time. There is no book of the New Testament which is more exactly a "Tract for the Times" than this.

*The Situation.*—The Fourth Gospel set the life of Christ in a philosophical light. It was a kind of Gnosis, that is to say it penetrated behind phenomena and endeavoured to present the events of time in the light of a hidden Order which is open only to the illuminated. The Logos, it is true, was identified

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with Jesus of Nazareth, but the connection was somewhat loose ; it gave, therefore, some excuse for leaving the historical ground and launching out into abstract and unverifiable speculations. Unless it were in some way guarded, it might give a starting-point for that dangerous Gnosticism which did actually invade and undermine the Christian Gospel during the second century. Gnosticism was a tendency, already existing before the Incarnation, which was sure to invade a spiritual religion like Christianity. Men appeared—Bardesanes, Basilides, Valentinus—their name was legion, who gathered a few disciples around them on the ground that they had a knowledge, an insight, a revelation, not open to the uninitiated. One would claim to see Creation as the work of a Deimurge, very far removed from God, and the world, therefore, as an order very different from the Divine. Another would fill in the distance between the Supreme Being and the visible order, with a procession of Emanations, or Aeons, which by filling the unseen world with imaginary beings, relieved the difficulty of associating the crude facts of existence directly with God.

Another would profess to see that Christ was different from Jesus, entered into him at the baptism, and left him before the Crucifixion ; or another would assert that the body and person of the Redeemer were only phenomenal, the real Christ being hidden behind them.

Other coteries worked on the lines of dualism, and opposed flesh to spirit, with the result which afterwards issued in Manicheeism ; the spirit might dissociate

itself from the flesh, and the flesh might indulge in its lusts without contaminating the spirit. This kind of antinomianism was the greatest peril of Gnosticism ; and some sects became clubs for the practice of prostitution, like the societies which exist in Hinduism to-day.

But whatever form Gnosticism might take, it was necessarily destructive of Christianity, because it presented truths derived from other sources than Christ and the Holy Spirit, and inevitably set the authority of the adept or the initiated above the authority of Christ.

The connection of Theosophy with this early Gnosticism is acknowledged by the leaders of Theosophy ; and therein lies the peril to Christianity which is involved in the spread of Theosophy.

These Gnostic tendencies at the end of the first century are identified with the name of Cerinthus ; and the legend that John hurried out of the bath where Cerinthus was bathing, lest the roof should fall on him, shows the dread with which the leaders of the Church regarded these unlicensed speculations. The dread is not groundless. If truth is discovered by Initiates, who have a peculiar psychic gift, and consequently see what others cannot see, it remains indemonstrable to all but the Initiates, and therefore the rest of us must depend only upon their word.

Truth on such conditions becomes much the same as error, because the initiates are always fallible, even when they are perfectly honest ; and the fresh revelations that come to them lead them farther and farther

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into the regions of the unverifiable. Meanwhile the disciples or students have no criterion by which to test the esoteric revelations, and their only course is abject and unreasoning submission.

In place of the Truth of the Gospel, the open secret, which every one, even the simplest of human beings, can receive and test, in place of Christ who shows the hidden truths to babes, while the wise and prudent miss them, we have a vast body of asserted truths and observations, which must be received from occultists, who can offer no better credentials than their own assertion. And when the occultist strays into fraud or moral obliquities the faithful have no security or guard. Having committed themselves to the self-constituted authority, and staked their mental life on obedience to it, they easily slide into the errors and call them truth, or are betrayed into the moral quagmires which they are convinced are firm ground.

It is well, therefore, that this little book confronts this recurring situation.

How is the situation met? The treatise, whether written by the author of the fourth Gospel or by another, comes from the same circle of thought. It is what may be called Johannine. The object seems to be to stop the Gnostic tendencies at the very beginning by asserting the truths of the Gospel which render Gnosticism unnecessary. Heresies are simply hammered down and beaten away by the iteration and reiteration of the essential truths.

Here is the first great truth. All started from the

One who was seen and handled at the beginning, the Son of the Father, Jesus Christ who came in the flesh. No spirit, however spiritual, that denies that is of God. The historic fact of Jesus, recognised as the Son of God, is the one sure starting-point of a world-religion. All the entanglements and hazy dreams and pretentious systems of Gnosticism and Theosophy are set aside by this simple principle. To know and understand Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son, is the beginning of wisdom, the key to spiritual knowledge, the security against the foggy exhalations of the human mind.

“Many false prophets are gone out into the world.” It was so then ; it is so now. Their claims and pretensions might deceive the very elect. But if the one sure test is applied the imposture can be quickly unveiled. Do they confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh ? Every spirit which confesseth not Jesus is not of God, and this is the spirit of antichrist.

For instance, the presumptuous theory that Jesus was only a disciple, and for his fidelity at his baptism the eternal Christ entered into him and acted through him until the Crucifixion, when the Christ withdrew and left Jesus to die, is the spirit of antichrist. “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God.” However specious the teacher, though he or she speak like an angel, and profess to solve all mysteries, the Christian will not listen. Antichrist is revealed.

This is the bed-rock of Christianity ; this is the hope of the world. Against this rock the waves of error and delusion beat ; but even the gates of hell cannot



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prevail ; this is the assured, fixed, constant, light of revelation.

The second great truth is that God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all. As we have seen, Gnosticism always, in time, betrays an antinomian tendency. Sin is explained away, or whittled down, until it is not distinguishable from goodness. That confusion of moral distinctions, or the attempt to treat God as indulgent or indifferent to sin, traverses the truth that God is Light. It asserts that God is Light, but also darkness, a twilight in which right and wrong have no longer any distinct meaning.

On the eternal truth that God is Light rests the need of Christ as the propitiation for our sins. His blood alone cleanses. So far from being indifferent, sin is so foul and gross an outrage upon God that it draws the blood of God's son, and can be forgiven only if that pouring out of His blood makes an atonement. And even when the atonement is made we must be cleansed from sin and must walk in the light if we are to have fellowship with one another and with God.

Only when we are thus at one with God are we the children of God.

The third great truth is that God is Love. By the brief simple statement of this truth, twice made, this treatise takes its place as the consummation of the Christian revelation. The statement seems to glide out so naturally and inevitably that the reader hardly notices how it has changed the whole aspect of heaven and earth, and the whole relation between God and man.



Paul taught that love was the fulfilling of the Law. Christ Himself summed up the commandments in one : Thou shalt love. The truth was therefore quivering and vibrating through every fact and teaching of the Gospel, but it was given to this writer to utter it for the first time. If everything led up to it so everything flows out of it. We reach the conclusion that GOD IS LOVE, and forthwith the new commandment that we are to love one another as God loves Christ, to love God as He loves us, to love the World as He loves the World, becomes the inevitable moral code. We grasp the meaning of our being children of God. And love does what no law could do—it makes us pure. Everyone that hath this hope set on Him, purifies himself even as He is pure. It is love that makes sin seem heinous. To sin is an unnatural new birth; we become children of the devil, instead of being children of God. But the unction of the Holy One keeps us and teaches us and we do not sin. God, who is Love, is holy ; we love God, and therefore we love holiness. Clearly we see all evil, all sin, as the work of the devil. With all the strength of love we resist this spirit hostile to love.

There is in a sense now only one commandment, for in it are summed up all the ten. God has simplified life and religion for us ; He has but one thing to say to us, and if we obey in this one thing everything else follows : “ Believe in the name of my Son Jesus Christ and love one another ” (iii. 23). Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the ever-blessed trinity, is the security against

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Gnosticism, Antinomianism, and all the destructive heresies of the human mind. God gave us eternal life, and that life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life, and he who has not the Son of God has not the life. We abide in this marvellous union of Father and Son, and hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He gave us (iii. 24).

The very clearness and simplicity of this Divine revelation throw into shadow the world which does not receive it. And alas ! the world did not and does not receive it. The Light shines, but the world shuts it out. The love of the world destroys the love of the Father ; the hatred of our fellow-men blinds us to the love of God. Though the light is ever shining in the blessed face of Christ, though God is ever seeking us, though the Spirit is accessible, ready like the light to enter, we remain cold, dark and impenetrable. This is the tragedy of the Gospel: men will not receive it or believe it. And thus there is the great division always.

The world is in darkness and in hate: we are in light and in love, for through Christ we are in God, and God is Light, God is Love. The amazing simplicity of it all seems to prevent us from seeing its depth. We take light and love for granted, and do not perceive the marvel. We push by a revealed God, to find out the treasures which lurk in darkness.

Thus was the situation met in the early confusions and delusions of Gnosticism. To-day we are surrounded by similar confusions, pretensions, corruptions

and delusions. If there were antichrists in the second century, there are more in the twentieth. They swarm around the Church and draw out one after another, as a lion steals into the encampment and carries off a sleeping coolie. These victims of illusion go out from us because they are not of us.

Never since the first age was confusion of thought greater. Never was it more difficult to get a firm foothold. Never was the anointing of the Holy One more necessary.

But unless we are greatly mistaken, in this epistle lies our remedy. Here is our armoury, in which we may be armed cap-à-pie to receive all the assaults of error. Not the least marvellous proof of a divine inspiration is that the whole defensive armour for all the ages and for the ever-changing circumstances should be contained in so brief and pellucid a writing. This is the mark of Divinity. Consider the voluminous literature of Buddhism and Theosophy, and the frequent warning to the uninitiated to stand aloof; and see in contrast this brief document, which invites *everyone* to read it and to understand it: "Ye need not that any one teach you; but as his anointing teacheth you concerning all things, and is true, and is no lie, and even as it taught you, ye abide in him" (ii. 27).

There will be no circumstances and developments, while the world lasts, which we shall not be able to meet by grasping the truths here stated, by using the weapons here suggested.



XXI

THE TWO NOTES OF JOHN

A.D. 105



## CHAPTER XXI

THE TWO NOTES OF JOHN      A.D. 105

THESE unimportant homely notes (ii. and iii. John), like drops of water under a microscope, can be made to disclose a teeming activity of life, though they add little to our knowledge and make but an uncertain contribution to the Christian religion. Indeed, they contain an unhappy counsel (ii. John, 10) which has been the age-long excuse for bigotry in the Christian Church, though, on the other hand, they contain a phrase (iii. John, 9) which ought to have been a warning against ecclesiastical ambition.

The instinct which for long gave them a doubtful place in the Canon—they were not admitted even in the beginning of the fourth century, when Eusebius drew up his list of canonical books—is quite intelligible. They did not seem weighty enough for inclusion in Holy Scripture. We should like to think that the hesitation arose because the spirit of ii. John 10 was felt to be not the mind of Christ; but there is no faintest shadow of reason for such a view. They were finally admitted because they seemed to be written by the author of 1 John. (*cf.* ii. John 1: "Whom I love in the truth," with 1 John iii. 15: "Little children, let

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us not love in word, neither with the tongue ; but in deed and truth.”)

The Elder (ii. John 1 and iii. John 1), can hardly be the designation of age, as in 1 Peter v. 1. It must be the name of an office in the Church, the Presbyter. The confusion between John the Apostle and John the Presbyter, was by the time of Irenæus, *i.e.*, a century before Eusebius, complete. Jerome did not regard them as the work of John the Apostle. If there had been any decisive reason for thinking that the Presbyter was the Apostle, there would have been no hesitation in admitting these two notes of “ the disciple whom Jesus loved ” into the body of Holy Scripture.

We must, therefore, find the interest of the notes, not in the writer, who cannot be determined, but in the contents, and the people to whom the notes were addressed. Their value lies only in this, that they evidently come from the same circle as the Fourth Gospel and First Epistle ; they are Johannine. They give us a fugitive glimpse into the Church at the beginning of the second century, the age of the *Didaché* ; and if the picture is not altogether agreeable, it is at least instructive.

There is the first germ of ecclesiastical intolerance. This writer distinctly reverses the noble toleration of the Master, who forbade John to rebuke the worker of miracles, who followed not with them, or to call down fire on the Samaritan village that would not receive them. If anyone came, not having the correct teaching of Christ, he was not to be received into the



house, nor even to receive a greeting. How early did the germ of error drop into the soil of the Church ! Even in a book which has found its way into the Canon is an idea which traverses the whole spirit and manner of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And there is the first clear sign of the evil which was to come from those who "love to have the pre-eminence in the Church."

We must summon the Love of God, and the truth of our Lord Jesus Christ, to sit in judgment on Scripture itself. Wrong is not made right because it has found its way into the Canon. We cannot, therefore, be too emphatic in saying that the counsel of ii. John 10 must be accepted with the utmost caution. It may have had a temporary or local validity, arising out of the circumstances of the Church to which it was addressed ; but to use it as a reason for refusing hospitality to one who does not take our view of Christian truth, is to place a single verse of an occasional note against the whole spirit of the Gospel, which teaches us to love our enemies, and to make the most strenuous efforts to restore and recover our erring brethren.

Diotrephes was an ecclesiastic of the kind which has made Christianity odious in the world, the inquisitor, the autocrat, whose mode of treatment to others is to use wild and whirling language against those who differ from him, and to fulminate excommunication from the Church for his opponents. But we may admit with perfect candour that the tone of the Elder towards this haughty and self-asserted brother, is hardly apostolic,

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or at least, hardly Christlike. Threats are not, according to Christ, to be met by threats, but by meekness. When one Christian abuses his place of authority, the remedy is not for a Christian in higher authority to treat him as he has treated those beneath him.

We may, therefore, on the whole, be genuinely thankful that we have no reason to ascribe these notes to the apostle John, which are more suitable to him at the time when the Master called him Boanerges, and told him that he knew not what spirit he was of, than in his mature life, when he leaned on the breast of the Lord, and was his beloved disciple.

I.—*The Second Epistle*.—I wish we could think that this was written to a lady and her children; it would seem more homely, more human. But the greeting in v. 13 seems to put the matter beyond question. The "elect lady" is a Church, and her "elect sister" is another Church. The Presbyter of one church is writing to another church, which is exposed to danger from false teachers. We involuntarily think that the errors are similar to those which are referred to in the First Epistle, the gnostic fancies and fictions which imperilled the faith in the incarnate Son of God.

The greeting is the usual formula of Christian letters: "Grace, mercy, peace, from God and from Christ." Only "mercy" is inserted. Does it begin to become plain that even Christ's Church, can live only by divine "mercy." Whatever excellence there may be in a Church, still "it is of the Lord's mercies that it is not consumed."

Some of the members were walking in the truth ; other were disobeying the commandment. Love was waning and growing cold. The Church was troubled with impostors, antichrists, who claimed to be "advanced" (v. 9), but they were really "advancing" out of Christ altogether. They denied the reality of the incarnation, *i.e.*, the truth that the Son of God had come in the flesh. By denying this they lost the Son, and in losing the Son they lost the Father ; for the whole Christian revelation of God consists in the revelation of the Father by the coming of the Son, and the inward assurance of this truth by the gift of the Spirit. Intellectuals and theosophists of all kinds, are always "advancing" beyond this Trinity of the Christian revelation, but they advance only into the unsunned spaces, which lie outside the light of revelation, and they lose the truth which alone sets men free and satisfies them. The charlatan, the false christ, the antichrist, is ever with us, ravaging and misleading. "Look to yourselves"—a constant and untiring vigilance is the condition of keeping our treasure. If ever we cease to abide in Christ, antichrist is at hand to seize us, and to claim our wandering hearts.

How are the deceivers to be dealt with ? The way here recommended has been adopted. Cyprian, of course, seized upon the weapon, and all the builders of exclusive and intolerant ecclesiasticism have followed his example. The legend of John leaving the bath because Cerinthus was in it may have grown out of this counsel, attributed to the apostle. Every atrocity

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of the Christian Church has sprung out of this spirit. Calvin allowed Servetus to be burnt for a book denying the Trinity. It can never be forgotten. Every church and sect has perpetrated a thousand intolerances on the same plea. If we are to refuse greeting and hospitality to every one who does not come bringing the teaching of Christ, how are we to win these deluded people to Christ? Is the law of Christ "that we love one another" (v. 5) to be entirely suspended directly people doubt or question the Christian verities? God forbid! It is that spirit above everything which leads men to doubt those verities. It is the Church intolerant, repelling, persecuting, which alienates men from Christ.

No, we must get the right perspective. This Church, "the elect lady," was invaded by deceivers of a notorious character, whom she was receiving to hearth and home too unsuspectingly. The Elder wrote to warn her; in his anxiety to preserve the Church uncontaminated he recommended that the deceivers should not be received at all. This recommendation he made in his absence, by pen and ink. Possibly when he saw the Church face to face and their joy was full, he was able to modify his advice, and to consider how the false teachers could be led back to the truth. For how shall we obtain, if we do not show, mercy?

II.—*The Third Epistle*.—The letter to Gaius, the beloved, omits the usual Christian formula, but it has an exquisite phrase, which of itself seems to justify the inclusion of the fugitive piece in the Canon. "I

pray that thou may'st prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth!" It is the writer's deep conviction that the soul's prosperity is the right norm; he may therefore pray that the body's health and well-being may correspond to the soul's. But he seems also to suggest that the connection is closer. The soul's health is the cause of the body's, and of external prosperity. Gaius was walking in the truth, his heart was right with God. And that inward harmony brought health and prosperity.

Out of his inner righteousness with God sprang his hospitality to "the brethren who were strangers withal." This reveals exactly the situation described in the contemporary *Didaché*. Travelling preachers, or "prophets," went from church to church. It was the duty of the Church to receive them and to entertain them for a day or two, but if they showed a disposition to impose on the Church's hospitality, they were to be regarded as false prophets, and summarily dismissed. In the present instance the prophets were worthy men, working for the sake of the Name, *i.e.*, Jesus (*cf.* Acts v. 41).

The phrase: "Thou wilt do well," v. 6, receives unexpected explanation from the papyri, which are restoring to us the vernacular Greek of the second century. It is the exact equivalent to our "please." The Elder asks Gaius to forward these prophets worthily of God. To receive Christ's servants in His name is to be fellow-workers with the Truth. These genuine preachers would not accept help from non-Christians;

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their support fell on Christians who would thus be promoting the truth in the servants of truth.

The little thumbnail sketch of Diotrophes, presents a striking contrast to the picture of Gaius which precedes, and that of Demetrius which follows. Diotrophes is described in Greek as *ὁ φιλοπρωτεύων αὐτῶν* the kind of man who must lord it over others. That desire for power leads men into all kinds of tricks, arbitrary self-assertions, overriding of the rights and the opinions of others. This man "prated against" the Elder "with wicked words." His objection to the Elder would be that he enjoyed, as this letter shows, a high consideration in the Church over which Diotrophes aspired to be a monarchical bishop. His attitude to the travelling preachers was uncompromising. He would not receive them himself, and he wished to expel from the church those who, like Gaius, were given to hospitality.

This type of character, the character of the ecclesiastical autocrat in all ages, is absolutely condemned. Such an evil doer has not seen God.

It is a relief to turn to Demetrius. Every one bore witness to him; better still, the truth did itself. And the writer, echoing a phrase of the fourth Gospel (John xxi. 24) adds his testimony, which is true.

Thus, between these two worthy and pious Christians, Gaius and Demetrius, stands Diotrophes for ever in the pillory.

The Elder hopes to visit this Church, as he hopes to visit the "elect lady." He will see Gaius face to face,

and will trounce Diotrephes with the memory of his ill-deeds. Then there is a delightful little Quakerly touch: "The friends salute thee; salute the friends by name." In *Acts* Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him leave to go unto his *friends* and refresh himself (xxvii. 3). It is a sweet variation of the more familiar "brethren." Brethren may be strangers (v. 5), but the brethren with whom we are in church-fellowship are not strangers, but "friends."

These two letters are curiously interesting pendants to the writing which taught us that God is love, and, therefore, that love of the brethren is the very essence of Christianity; for they remind us how, from the beginning, the difficulty was to maintain in practice the love which was theoretically enjoined. The Church was to be a society for the cultivation of this principle, which is Christian because it is divine. But even in the Church, where Christ's name is on our lips, and Christ's love is perpetually commemorated, the struggle to maintain love is continuous. The breach of the New Commandment is always bringing the Church itself into peril.

In the Letters of Paul we saw how his Churches were invaded by gross vices, by greed, and by a sectarian spirit, which were all fatal to love. But in these later letters, which seem to reflect the beginning of ecclesiastical organizations, further perils appear, perils arising out of the interest of the Truth itself, and perils arising from the perverse ambitions of ecclesiastics.

The passion for truth, one of the noblest of Christian



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graces, may, if we are not careful, turn the milk of human kindness sour. The love of correct doctrine must never be allowed for one moment to be in excess of the love of God or the love of man. The most acrid, portentous, and destructive minds in the history of the Church are those which conceived themselves set to maintain orthodoxy. Alva went with the sword blessed by the Pope, the Vicar of Christ, to exterminate a whole nation, as Dominic, with the dogs of the Lord, had exterminated the Albigenses. It is an appalling thought that a religion of love may fall into the ghastly inconsistency of persecuting, torturing, and burning those who will not accept it. What kind of love is that which forces itself on men by such methods? It is the love of devils; it is the fire of hell. The religion which starts with the glorious commandment: "Love your enemies," may glide imperceptibly into one which says that you are to destroy *its* enemies.

What a subtle deceiver is ever working to destroy the Church, first by repressing zeal, and then by turning zeal into fanaticism.

Love is of no account, and, indeed, is not love at all in the divine sense, until it becomes love of all, love even of the wicked, the unbeliever, the infidel. The sour, fiery passion which says men shall believe in God or be damned, is a "love" which entirely misrepresents the God in whom they are to believe.

Here, more than anywhere, the deceiver of souls is unveiled. He prevents us from believing if possible, but if that is impossible, he pushes on our belief to



become a possession, an intolerant tyranny, a fanaticism. He tries to impose on faith the duty, not of winning unbelief by love, but of crushing it by force.

And then Diotrophes ! The love of pre-eminence is in the long run inconsistent with any other love. It is of all passions the most subtle and unsuspected by the one who is its victim. It is like a drug-habit ; fresh draughts or inhalations are needed, the quantity must be always increased. The miserable self-poisoner always maintains that the poison does him good, or is necessary for life and work. The passion for pre-eminence always seems to Diotrophes himself a passion to benefit others, to serve truth, to promote progress and even to serve religion. Diotrophes would say that he is enthroning Christ, when he is clutching at power himself.

Dominic is totally unconscious of personal aims when he is hounding down heretics and bringing them to their death. Ignatius Loyola, in establishing the most unmitigated tyranny over the souls of men, has but one object in view—to serve Jesus, to build up the Church which the Reformers have injured. This type of mind starts with excellent motives :

“ Were it not better to bestow  
Some place or power on me ?  
So would Thy praises with me grow,  
And share in my degree.”

In the first instance it uses its place and power sincerely and honestly for the cause. It never notices the silent and gradual transition of zeal in the service into delight in mastery. Never, till it is far too late,

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does it recognize that all its zeal for mother church has been its own desire for pre-eminence.

As the destructive power of the Church and of religion, as a disastrous anti-Christ, there is nothing which works so mordantly as this ecclesiastical ambition. No enemy from without has injured the Church as men like Hildebrand, Thomas à Becket, Wolsey, have done, who have unconsciously inserted their own ambition in the place where love to God and man should have been. The bitterness, the exclusiveness, the tyranny, the cruelty, which have sprung from this disastrous sin, have driven out love from the Church, and have made it sound like an irony, to quote the saying about the first believers: "See how these Christians love one another!"

These perils to love—most of which are already laid bare within the compass of the New Testament, are the rocks on which the Church is wrecked. These Johannine writings are the great security on the whole against these perils. They present Jesus always saying to His disciples, again and again: "Lovest thou Me?" They sweep us up to the height of theology in the doctrine: "God is Love."

And tradition records how John, a very aged man, no longer able to teach or to preach, would enter the Christian assemblies, and spreading out his hands would say: "Little children, love one another."

This is the last word of religion, and the first word of heaven.

This is the supreme, all-inclusive, lesson that we have to learn.

XXII

THE PASTORALS

A.D. 110



## CHAPTER XXII

### THE PASTORALS

A.D. 110

WHY did we leave these "letters of St. Paul" until now? Why did we not place them with the other ten? The answer is, that they are Paul's in quite another and peculiar sense. They are not in the same category as the epistles which form the earliest stratum of the New Testament; they form the last, or the penultimate stratum, and a momentous interval lies between the two groups.

Fifty years have passed. The Churches have entered on a new stage of development. These two letters to Timothy and one to Titus, closely united in diction, tone, spirit and purpose, "betray the conditions and motives of a later age," says Beyschlag, "from which they can only be artificially and imperfectly transferred to the lifetime of the apostle, and except in a few phrases, which may have belonged to a genuine letter here embodied, they are as far apart as the poles from Paul's own modes of thinking and writing. Especially in the largest of the three (1 Tim.) we may confidently say: the man who is now able to ascribe it to the author of the Epistles to the Romans

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and to the Galatians has never comprehended the literary peculiarity and greatness of the apostle."

This verdict of modern criticism is not accepted with unanimity. Attempts will always be made to reverse it, and to vindicate the constant tradition of the Church that the Pastorals were written by Paul just as the four foundation epistles were. But the task is an arduous one. For three stubborn facts have to be explained away :

1. The remarkable difference of the diction. These three epistles employ another style and another set of words than those used by Paul. While the three are similar to one another they are quite dissimilar to Paul's writings. In these five pages—not half the length, all told, of *Romans*—there are one hundred and eighty ἀπαξ λεγόμενα, i.e., words and phrases not found in Paul's letters. The development of so new and decisive a vocabulary requires a considerable interval of time, and is inexplicable on the supposition that these letters were written in the same years, or even in the years immediately succeeding the other epistles.

2. But even more striking than the change of diction is the difference of the teaching. For example, in Paul's letters there are two ideas which play a very decisive part—faith and justification. Faith is the spiritual act by which we are justified ; justification is that reconciliation with God which is effected by the death of Christ. The ideas are so specific, and so distinctive, that Paul would hardly be Paul if by

πίστις he did not mean this faith which justifies, and by δικαιοσύνη he did not mean justification. But in the Pastorals πίστις has come to mean the body of things believed, the creed of the Church. It was a fateful change, for it led the Church for many contentious centuries to teach that the saving faith is the intellectual acceptance of certain theological dogmas ; though Paul always taught, as our Lord Himself did, that faith was the personal trust in Christ, as the expression of God's will and saving work for us. In the latest stratum of the New Testament the *fides quæ creditur* has quite ousted the *fides quæ credit*.

Righteousness, again, in the Pastoral letters, bears the ordinary meaning which it always bore before Paul annexed the word for his specific purpose. It is only the moral quality, to be ranked with other moral qualities, and not the all-decisive transaction by which the soul is brought into a saving relation with God (1 Tim. vi. 11, ii. Tim. ii. 22).

But one passage is enough in itself to show that the Pastorals belong to a totally different theological atmosphere from Paul's. It was Paul's own supreme contention that salvation comes not by works but by grace. We are justified by faith, and not by the works of the law. In 1 Tim. vi. 18, 19, on the other hand, the doctrine of works and merit, which has pervaded most religions, and has even dominated Christianity from the earliest days to the Reformation, is quite naïvely stated. Just as we should know that a sermon was not Luther's, if in place of justification by

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faith the idea of salvation by works were propounded, so, and even more decisively, we know that Paul is not directly responsible for documents which thus ignore his distinctive teaching.

It has been the tragedy of Christianity that its greatest truths were beyond the conception of the first believers; they start up from the pages of the New Testament, from the words of Jesus, and from the creative minds of Paul, and the Epistle to the Hebrews, and John, to correct the theological blunders and perversions which apparently come out of the Christian Gospel, but are really imported into it from other sources. It is interesting and instructive to find how the errors which have neutralised the Gospel show the first shoots of their subsequent growth in these latest strata of the New Testament itself.

3. The third difficulty which would have to be overcome in order to vindicate these as original letters of Paul is that it is impossible to place the letters in the life of the apostle as it appears in *Acts* and his own epistles. The only possible supposition is that they belong to a period later than these, our main, authorities. We have to suppose that Paul was liberated from the Roman imprisonment, with which *Acts* closes, and to which *Philippians* refers; that he took other journeys, like the one to Crete, referred to in *Titus*; that he was again imprisoned and finally executed, *ii Tim.* forming his last word before he suffered. This hypothesis seems plausible for the moment, but doubt immediately supervenes. Why



should he refer to the sufferings of those early days at Iconium and Lystra (ii Tim. iii. 11) and not to the innumerable toils and persecutions through which he had afterwards passed, well known to Timothy? We unhesitatingly feel that this reference could only come, if from a letter of Paul's at all, from a letter written to Timothy when the experiences of that early missionary journey were fresh in the memories of writer and correspondent.

These three difficulties are not very likely to be overcome. As they are intrinsic, and obvious to the student who ventures to face the facts, it is a mistake to hide our head in the sand, or to trust vaguely to a possible vindication of the Pauline authorship in the future. It is a genuine result of an honest and reverent criticism which forces us to seek another explanation and to justify these letters as "Pauline" in a secondary sense. *They were written at a later date, half a century after Paul had passed to his reward; written in the name of the apostle in order to adapt his teaching to new circumstances and times.*

A forgery! the uninstructed cry with horror. The uninstructed, I say, by which I mean those who are ignorant of the ancient ideas and practices in literature. To quote a wise remark of Mr. Simcox, "to a writer of this period it would seem as legitimate an artifice to compose a letter as to compose a speech in the name of a great man whose sentiments it was desired to reproduce and record. The question which seems so important to us, whether the words or even the

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sentiments were the great man's own or only his historian's, seems then hardly to have occurred either to writers or readers."

This form of composition might be used, as in this case, for the best of purposes. A Church writer might issue letters in Paul's name, most likely containing fragments of letters which had come into his hands, to enforce some of Paul's well-known teaching under new conditions. And such a writing might be, as in this case, a Scripture inspired of God, profitable for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. We call writings of this character pseudepigraphical. But the word *pseudo*, which is "false," is a question-begging epithet. Anything false is *ipso facto* condemned, and very properly condemned. But this style of writing is not "false"; it might rather be described as humble. The writer feels that his name is of no importance, and modestly says what he has to say in the name of Paul, which carries weight. "False" it would be if he misrepresented Paul, or endeavoured to reverse Paul's teaching in Paul's name. But no one can say that there is any intention of this kind. He desires to say what Paul would say in these circumstances. He uses what he knows of Paul's teaching and life, perhaps even scraps of his letters. And in this veiled form, under this personification, he utters such truth as is in him. Unless we are able and willing to recognise and to justify this method of teaching we render these latest books of the New Testament an insoluble problem, and unwittingly

bring discredit on the other genuine writings of the apostles, by charging them with self-contradictions.

In the opening of the second century, then, when Basilides was substituting Gnosticism for Christianity, between the time when the Johannine epistles were written and the time that the last genuine attempts were made to write for apostles like Jude and Peter, a writer, not impossibly Timothy or Titus, or one other of the younger intimates of Paul, composed these early Church documents. Incipient Gnosticism and recrudescent Judaism threatened the teaching and works of Paul, undermining his churches in Ephesus, in Crete, and elsewhere.

Some teachers said that the resurrection had taken place (ii. Tim. ii. 18). Some tried to base Christian teaching on the legendary pedigrees of Jewish heroes, which swarm in the Book of Jubilees. Some made fanciful schemes of æons, or spiritual powers in pairs; that sort of fantastic world which Theosophy builds up to-day. Some denied the Fall, and called it a fall upwards; the serpent was the gnosis which liberated men from the Demiurgus, and raised them to God. Some prohibited marriage. Silly women were the victims and the vehicles of these wild and baseless theories. There was a *schwärmerei* of errors and corruptions, attended, as always, by moral defilement, and possibly incipient insanity.

The *Pastorals* are a manifesto, issued most probably from Rome, to meet these manifold perils. They represent a climax of Paulinism, the direction in which it

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was believed Paul would have moved if he had been living. They are therefore confidently introduced by the formula of Pauline letters.

There are two distinct, though allied, methods of facing the danger :

1. By organising the Congregational Church, with its elders, deacons, and deaconesses. The elders are called *episcopi* (bishops), and it almost seems as if one of them was to be *primus inter pares*, the head of the Church. This is the hint of the monarchical episcopate which appears in the letters of Ignatius a few years later. The chief minister of the congregation was to be the guardian and security against error.

2. By constituting the sound doctrine, or wholesome teaching, of the apostles, a norm, a type, a mould, as it were, by which all fresh teaching should be tested. This doctrine was the heritage of the Church, the deposit which must by no means be lost.

The apostolic doctrine, as it appears here, is not so much an elaborate system of dogmas as the eternal and necessary connection between religion and morals, between faith and goodness. The cardinal error is the loss of goodness, and the substitution of useless theories, ascetic practices, and immoral suggestions for the plain, wholesome truth of Christ as it was given in the Gospel.

The Church of Paul, with its numberless charismata and varied spiritual life is crystallised, on Paul's authority, into a sober community with a regular ministry. A momentous change has taken place.

The first sign of hymns and liturgical forms appears (1 Tim. iii. 16; ii. Tim. iii. 16). But with the gains come losses. The doctrine, which came from Paul with all the force of an original and conscious revelation, is now a deposit from the past, to be carefully guarded and transmitted. When doctrine is crystallised it is secured, but it is also arrested. What was a supernatural growth becomes a definitely limited system. The plant has passed out of the garden into the herbarium. And if this crystallised creed should ever be substituted for the life of the spirit and the growing force of truth, the religion would perish.

We can see, then, why these letters are a manual of ecclesiastical procedure, an anthology of Pauline injunctions and aphorisms, an invaluable guide to practice both in Church and life; and yet they would be useless, and even injurious, unless we had behind them the living word of the Gospels and the fresh spiritual energies of the great New Testament writers, such as Paul and John.

We may try at this point to define in what sense the letters are Paul's. They are like a volume of memoirs and remains which is published after the death of some famous man. Such fragments are not like his own considered and finished work; they lack continuity and connection; their dates and occasions are lost. And yet they are sufficiently connected with him to be welcome.

Paul is in the letters, but not quite the Paul of the genuine letters; it is Paul as he is remembered and

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imperfectly understood by the next generation. It is as if Paul, now passed to his reward, spoke again through his trusted lieutenants, and uttered some final precepts and warnings to the Church setting out on her adventurous career.

Evidently, then, we cannot quote these letters as authority for Paul's life. We cannot quote them as Paul's doctrine. His own letters have made his doctrine far too distinct to admit of this confusion.

But the truth and wisdom contained in the letters, and the felicitous expressions of Christian ideas and beliefs, resting on their own merit, give the writings an extraordinary value. If they are sub-apostolic they have incomparably more value in them than is to be found in all the sub-Apostolic Fathers put together. Put them side by side with the contemporary *Didaché*, and you see how much more valuable they are. Paul is in them, as no apostle was in the writings of the second century. And it is not as pseudepigraphical writings of Paul, but because of the spirit of Paul in them, that their place in the Canon is justified.

We have seen that fragments of Paul's genuine letters to Timothy and Titus, his lieutenants, may be identified in the letters. We may hesitate to be definite. But in 2 Timothy (which is the earliest of the three) we distinctly detect the voice of Paul in ch. i. 15-18, which is like an erratic boulder of Paul's correspondence strangely embodied in an irrelevant context. A similar erratic boulder from Paul's earliest letters to Timothy is found in ch. iii. 10-12. Then

we cannot doubt that ch. vi. 6-22 may be accepted as autobiographical. A letter to Timothy from his Roman prison, just before the end, was probably the starting point of the thought of writing in this literary form.

But even the casual reader will be conscious that the passage is a cento of messages from different letters at different times; for in ch. iv. 11 the writer says: "Only Luke is with me"; but ch. iv. 21 refers to a time when he was surrounded with friends: "Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, Claudia and all the brethren."

In Titus also there is another erratic boulder from Paul's correspondence, far too realistic to be written by an author who is thinking only of edification. That is ch. iii. 12, 13.

In the First Epistle we cannot detect any definite quotations from letters of Paul, but again and again we are conscious of echoes from what Paul may have written to Timothy. We could think that Timothy himself, remembering the tenor of letters which Paul had written to him, wrote the whole composition in the spirit of his loved master. But the writer, whoever he was, falls far short of Paul. Paul's fine and discriminating argument, and copious involutions of style, are utterly wanting. The writer does not tackle definite facts, as Paul did. The denunciation is vague; the exhortations are general.

And yet the whole work is very genuinely Christian, and breathes the spirit which is distinctive of the New



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Testament. There are sentences which shine like stars, crystalline and eternal. Such are the two fragments of hymn or liturgy already referred to. Such is the quotation from Paul's letter to the Romans (under the form "faithful is the saying" (ii Tim. ii. 11). The quotation is from Romans vi. 8.

Again, there is no better epitome of the Gospel in the whole of the New Testament than Titus ii. 11-14, which, though Paul did not write it, he would have been glad to write.

Then, justly, is 1 Timothy i. 15 one of the most frequently quoted texts in the Bible. This seems also a saying quoted from Paul (1 Cor. xv. 9). And the outbreaks of praise to God have set a note in the Church which at last swells into the *Te Deum*. "Now unto the King eternal, incorruptible, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever" (1 Tim. ii. 17), or, "The blessed and only Potentate, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords; who only hath immortality, dwelling in light unapproachable, whom no man hath seen or can see; to whom be honour and power eternal" (1 Tim. v. 14-16).

Here the Church is filled with anthems, and draws near to heaven.



XXIII

JAMES

A.D. 110



## CHAPTER XXIII

JAMES

A.D. 110.

THERE is a singular charm about this epistle, which is more like a homily, or a collection of fragments from sermons, than an ordinary letter. It is full of the kind of imagery which appeals to a congregation in all ages. It is severely practical, and does not carry the reader into any uncomfortable heights or depths of the spiritual life. Its religion is without dogmas. There have always been minds, like Renan's, that find the book of Ecclesiastes the most attractive part of the Old Testament ; such minds will probably find *James* the most attractive part of the New. It is so thoroughly human, so unmistakable, so adapted for the man in the street, and yet its Greek style is so chaste and beautiful, that it seems suited for all needs. The name of Jesus is hardly mentioned. His life and death, the cross and forgiveness, find no place here at all. This made Luther call it an "epistle of straw," by which he meant that it contained no grain by which the soul can live. But it is this defect which is for many minds its great recommendation. Those who are insensible to mysticism, and are untouched by Paul's passion for Christ and sense of identification with him ; those who mistake

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John's limpidness for want of depth, and set the synoptic Gospels over against the Fourth, and even against Paul, in order to depreciate those attempts at interpretation, find everything to their taste in this Epistle.

Tradition declares that James was the Lord's brother, the head of the Church at Jerusalem when Paul paid his first visit to that Church as a Christian. While the tradition was unquestioned, arguments were built on James calling himself the "slave" of his august brother. This would place the epistle at the very beginning of the Christian literature; the "Twelve Tribes in the dispersion" would be the Jewish Christian churches of Apostolic times; and we should put the date earlier than the letters of Paul. Deissmann defends this view, and says: "The epistle of St. James will be best understood in the open air, beside the piled sheaves of the harvest field; it is the first powerful echo of the still recent synoptic Gospel books."\*

But directly tradition is questioned, and its spell is broken, everything makes the early date improbable; and if the work does not come early, it can only be placed very late among New Testament books. There is nothing, except tradition, to identify James (a very common name) with the Lord's brother, and the head of the Jerusalem church. There is nothing in the book to suggest that he belonged to the apostolic circle. There is no reference to the Jewish Christianity, which was the object of Paul's polemic; the Law and

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\* "Light from the Ancient East," p. 241.

Circumcision are not mentioned ; there is nothing Jewish in style or thought, except that the letter is addressed to the "Twelve Tribes," and the church assembly is called a "synagogue." And the fatal objection to the supposition that the writer was one of the apostolic circle is this—that the letter only won its way at first in the Syriac translation, and was not recognised in the Canon of the Latin Church until the middle of the Fourth Century.

Thus a preponderance of opinion regards *James* as almost the latest of the books of the New Testament, contemporaneous, not with Paul, but with the *Didaché*. If the book won its way to the Canon on the supposition that James was the Lord's brother, we can be thankful for the mistake. How much poorer would the New Testament have been without this "epistle of straw." If it is not the grain by which the soul can live, the straw is beautiful for its own sake, like that straw-thatched roof of the shed in Botticelli's "Nativity," which glitters like gold above the head of the child and the mother, and beneath the feet of the dancing angels.

The whole situation revealed, when we come to consider, is very far removed from the situation in Paul's time. There is no absorption in Christ, his life and death, though there are many references to his teaching ; there is no such statement of the central truths of the Gospel as we found even in the Pastorals. The interest is not Christological, nor Theological. It is as if the fundamental doctrines were assumed as well known. Just as a preacher to-day will speak on

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practical questions, and apply the message to concrete cases, hardly referring to the Incarnation, the Cross and Passion of the Lord, the gift of the Holy Spirit, or the Blessed Trinity, so this writer makes only passing allusions to the Christian truths, as if they were there, acknowledged, inscribed on the walls of the synagogue, too familiar to need repetition. "The faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Glory" is a fixed quantity, a body of truth, a regulative law, though, unlike the Jewish law, a law of liberty. The Church has already travelled some distance along her appointed way, and the origins begin to take on the atmosphere and authority of age.

Most striking of all, Christianity is no longer confined to the poor. It has its rich men, who hold back the wages of the poor, and exploit their brothers, while they are rewarded by the chief places in the church. Their fine clothing and jewellery secure respect, where once the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit was the only jewel and the clothing most in demand was the righteousness of Christ.

But what shows most clearly that we have travelled a long way from the times of Paul, is that Paul's doctrine of justification by faith had been tried long enough to show the misunderstandings and misapplications to which it was liable. It was used as a cloak for careless living, and a reason for omitting the plain duties of a Christian. Because, as Paul says, we are saved, not by works of righteousness, but by grace, because, according to the word of the Lord himself, there was

no merit to be earned by good living, the antinomians had begun to slight good living and to discredit works of righteousness. Faith was substituted for works, and it was forgotten that the only evidence of a genuine faith was to be found in the works of love, mercy, purity, and righteousness, which it inevitably produces. We are not saved by these works, but because we are saved by grace, these works naturally appear.

The time has come to bring out the other side of truth, which in Paul's eager and burning polemic was in the background. True, we do not earn salvation; no works could merit that which is God's supreme gift of grace; but salvation is a relation to God which results in a holy life, and to think that an act of faith which does not produce holiness can save, is just as unsubstantial as the reflected image in a mirror. There for a moment, it is gone directly the face is removed.

James is not assailing Paul's teaching of faith, which in all probability he failed to understand; but he is correcting the abuses and perversions which had grown out of that teaching.

The protest is most appropriate in the New Testament. As Paul's view is vital and essential, so James' correction is salutary, to preserve the doctrine of justification by faith from abuse. The tree has its roots, and it bears its leaves and fruit. Paul was concerned with the root, for that is essential, and without there would be no tree. The good tree brings forth good fruit. James was concerned to show that

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if it did not bring forth fruit the root was dead ; a root without a tree is useless.

We wish we knew this James better. He was in touch with the Wisdom Literature as well as with the Synoptic Gospels. His literary style suggests that he was a cultivated man ; and there is so much in common between him and Clement and Hermas, the Roman writers of the first century, that we cannot help picturing him in Rome, living amongst the founders of Western Christianity. We feel that the " twelve tribes scattered abroad " is a figure of speech for the Church which was beginning to occupy all parts of the Roman Empire, and we look on the word " synagogue " (ii. 2) as a most interesting link of connection between the Jewish congregations which abounded in the Roman Ghetto and the Christian Churches which were modelled on them.

The epistle is more like a homily than a letter ; or rather, it is like a cento of hortatory passages from a series of sermons. The imperative abounds. But the passages are chosen for their pith, or force, or beauty ; so that it is an anthology of " curt and marrowy expressions." We should like to think that these were culled from the sermons of James, the Lord's brother, or James the apostle, issued long after and put into form by a cultivated Greek writer ; but the expressions are too racy and characteristic to be translations. And though the subjects are far too loosely grouped to let us speak of a connected argument running through the work, there is a unity in the composition ; that is to



say, the same voice is speaking to us, though on a variety of subjects. It is a mind, moral, practical, eloquent. Wisdom, in the familiar Jewish sense of the word, is not philosophy, or speculation; but morality, right conduct. The writer feels that conduct is the principal thing in life, and he regards religious truth as a means of producing the best conduct. Faith without works is his *bête noir*. He was only too familiar with people who had "faith," as they called it, but produced no corresponding fruit. Faith is the root of works; a root that produces nothing is dead. Such "faith," a shrivelled leaf rather than a living seed, is abhorrent to him, not more abhorrent than it would have been to Paul, but Paul had such a living and glowing grasp of faith, "the faith in the Son of God who loved him and gave himself for him," that the idea of faith *not* producing works hardly came within his purview. James, we may surmise, had no such grasp of the idea of faith. Faith was to him a kind of thing which even devils have. He meant by it only the acceptance of a truth, not the living relation to a divine, redeeming, transforming person.

"Believe," said Paul; "Love," said John. Then comes in a clear, balanced voice which says: "Take care that you do the works of faith and love lest you delude yourselves with empty words." This is James.

We may observe that in these excerpts from the practical teaching of the early Church, the point of view is not always exactly the same, as we shall see in a moment in the treatment of temptation. Perhaps

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we get the best view of the whole if we distinguish five groups : first, one on Trial ; second, one on Deeds ; third, one on Words ; fourth, Counsels, and finally, a very striking and original Epilogue.

1. Trial, *πειρασμός*. Here there is a certain confusion arising out of an ambiguity in the word. There are trials, temptations, which are a blessing, a reason for joy (i. 2-8) ; they are like the furnace which purifies gold. There is also a "temptation" which is wholly evil : in God it finds no place ; it is the product of lust in the human heart, and it leads to death. But the common element in this double meaning is that out of "temptation" in either sense good may come. In the first case the gold is tried in the fire ; in the second case the evil resisted and overcome brings to the victor a crown of life.

The echo of the gospels is very clear in verses 17, 18, where God is recognised as the author of all good, and as the Father of our spirits ; we are born by the Word of Truth to be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures (i. 1-18).

2. *Deeds* (i. 19—ii.). This is the most vivid and picturesque statement of the truth—that religion must show itself in deeds. So vivid is the writing that we may say of the writer here, as Richter said of Luther, that his words were deeds. There is the thoroughly evangelic thought that all our goodness comes from the "engrafted word" received. In that lies our salvation. But having received that word, we must see to it that we are not hearers only, but doers of it.

The cultus, or worship of God, consists in the right restraint of the tongue—words and deeds are necessarily allied—in visiting the needy, in the unspotted conduct. In the worship of the church, or, as he quaintly calls it, the synagogue, social distinctions vanished. Rich and poor are on exactly the same level; to honour the well-dressed man and to despise the poor “in vile clothing” is irreligious. God is not Mammon. Riches are of no account in His eyes.

The Law of Liberty is not without its rigidity and strictness. It is in a way more severe than the strictest regulation. Regulations are not innumerable; if they are kept, all is done. But the Law of Liberty has no regulations; there is no point at which you can say: “All this have I kept.” It is a spirit, a principle, which leads to the fulfilment of all Divine commandments, whatever they are; a spirit of equity (as against justice), of mercy (as against strictness), of love (as against mere correctness).

Then a faith which does not produce its appropriate works is exposed in its hollowness. It is a lively characterisation. The antithesis of the Pauline view is presented. Abraham was not justified by an empty faith, but by a faith which led him to offer up Isaac. Rahab’s faith would have been nothing unless she had shown it by sheltering and saving the spies. Then by a challenging reversal of the position as it would have been stated in Pauline circles, where Faith would have been the spirit, and the works the body, this writer declares that the works are the spirit of life in

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the body, and faith without them is the body without life.

This, as we have seen, is not a polemic against Paul ; it is the supplementary truth, or explanation, to the doctrine of justification by faith ; but it undoubtedly shows that when the epistle was written, the inwardness of Paul's doctrine was lost, and faith had begun to mean only a creed, a body of dogmas intellectually accepted.

3. *Words* (ch. iii). The hint of i. 23 is taken up again, and some of the most salutary and striking things ever spoken about the use of the tongue are set down. If the tongue is rightly used—not over-used, nor abused—everything will be well. The bridled tongue is the bridled horse firmly guided by the strong hand. The tongue is the rudder of the ship, which directs its course. If it is bad or mad it sets everything on fire, it turns everything out of its course.

The writer has a knowledge of Astrology (cf. i. 17), and that determines the curious phrase, “ birth wheel,” which the tongue sets on fire.\* It is like a wild animal that must be tamed. It must be made harmonious, uttering only what is good and true ; not a fountain that pours out sweet and bitter waters, or a tree which bears fruits of different kinds, good and bad. Quarrelling is the worst use of the tongue.

Then over against the tongue's follies is set the pure, serene figure of Wisdom. How gracious she is—what a sweet sowing she makes for a rich harvest !

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\* Heinrici : *Der litterarische Character der neutestamentlichen Schriften*. p. 74.

4. *Counsels* (iv.—v. 12). There is a warning against worldliness and pride, in the midst of which occurs a verse of ambiguous meaning—verse 5. But a very beautiful truth flashes out, if we translate literally :

“ Jealously He yearns for the Spirit  
Which He made to dwell in us.”

The love of the Father is the antidote to the love of the world. Resist the Devil, and draw nigh to God, humble, submissive, trustful.

Then the Master's precept, “ Judge not,” is enlarged on (iv. 11, 12). A warning against presumption (iv. 13–16) has produced a very lasting effect. The D.V. of ordinary parlance, *Deo volente*, is the attempt to observe the precept. And then is shot out an aphorism which is like a searchlight cast over the whole sea of conduct. To know to do good, and *not* to do it, is sin. It is the echo of the Master's own teaching, in Luke xii. 47.

Another echo of the Master's teaching is heard in the severe censure of the rich (v. 1–6) for their callousness, and, perhaps unconscious, injury, to the poor.

Quite in the spirit of Jesus also is the exhortation to patience, and the thought that the Parousia may be close at hand. If we are right in dating the epistle so late, we have an evidence that the belief in the advent of the Lord as imminent, which had to be corrected by Paul and John to avoid mistakes, was yet kept as the abiding deposit of the Lord's teaching. “ The Judge standeth before the doors ”—that is the keynote, and the essential spirit of Christianity.

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How closely James is following the Lord's teaching is then shown by a direct quotation from His own words on swearing (Matt. v. 34).

5. Then follows an *Epilogue*, which is the most practical, and encouraging, exhortation of all, expressing in a few graphic touches all the distinctive ideas of the Christian religion. Prayer and praise are the very atmosphere of the Church. Sickness will be healed in answer to prayer. Mutual confession and mutual intercession bring pardon and healing.

Especially the prayer of a righteous man is prevalent—like Elijah's. And the final thought is that to convert sinners is the Christian's noblest occupation, and surest way of righteousness.

It will be seen, then, that if this is an "epistle of straw," as Luther impatiently called it, straw has its uses and its beauty.

XXIV

JUDE AND II PETER

A.D. 150 (?)





## CHAPTER XXIV

JUDE AND II PETER      A.D. 150 (?)

THE two closely-related letters with which, as we suppose, the Canon of the New Testament closes, did not obtain admission to what we call the Canon until very late. The Muratorian Canon of the mid-second century contains *Jude* but not *ii Peter*. If there had been any proof that they were the work of Judas, the brother of Jesus (Mark vi. 3), or of Peter, the first of the apostles, they would have been recognised much earlier. And we may say more: If they had been in existence, they would assuredly have been recognised and quoted, for there is much in them of great interest for all time.

We are assured that they are the work of a later age, and that they belong to a kind of composition, common enough in antiquity, and not unknown in our own age. An author writes a letter or a speech, as from some well-known person, in order to enforce ideas which are his own, without presuming to obtrude his own personality.

You see at once that the age of the apostles lies in the past. The "saints" unto whom the faith was once for all delivered (Jude 3) are referred to as we refer

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to "pious founders." The prophets, and the word spoken "through your apostles" (II. Pet. iii. 2) are the authorities quoted, in a way which is quite inconceivable if the first of those apostles were himself writing. The word "spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 17) seems even to point to a Scripture already formed into a recognised canon, and ii. Tim. iii. 1, and I Tim. iv. 1-5, might be the passages quoted; in which case the *Pastorals* were already accepted as Scripture, when this author wrote. Indeed, the epistles of Paul. "our beloved brother," are recognised as a source of Divine wisdom, though their obscurity had led already to some of that wresting of Scripture with which we have been familiar ever since.

Moreover, there is a significant silence in these works concerning the subjects which absorbed the thought of the apostolic writers: the Resurrection, the Cross, the Holy Spirit. We find ourselves in an atmosphere of heretical teaching, a decay of faith and corruption of life, due to the long delay of the expected Parousia of the Lord. The heretical teachers who are denounced with such vehemence cannot be identified with certainty, but they seem to be those Gnostics, whose perversion of the Christian truth was the earliest peril which the infant Church had to confront. The contrast between *ψυχικοί* (translated "sensual") and *πνευματικοί* (spiritual) in Jude 19, suggests a Gnostic distinction, though the distinction of "natural" and "spiritual," out of which it may have grown, is found in Paul

(1 Cor. xv. 44-46). The difference of atmosphere between *Jude* and Paul is well illustrated by this word. In Paul  $\psi\upsilon\chi\iota\kappa\acute{o}\varsigma$  means natural, as opposed to spiritual (1 Cor. ii. 14). In *Jude* the word cannot be rendered "natural," it has acquired another, and a specific, meaning, which our version seeks to render by "sensual."

Also that transition from the Pauline to the Ecclesiastical meaning of Faith, which we noted taking place in the Pastorals is now completed.  $\pi\iota\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$  is no longer subjective, the exercise of an inward spiritual faculty, it is the *fides quæ creditur*, the body of truths once delivered to the saints, the foundation on which the Christian life is built, the Creed (Jude 3 20.)

If we are tempted to distinguish Peter from *Jude*, and to maintain that while the latter may be a pseud-epigraphical work, we may still regard *ii Peter* as a genuine letter of the Apostle's, as it obviously claims to be (*ii Peter* i, 1-16, and iii. 1), we are deterred not only by the reference to the "apostles" as an authority distinct from the writer (*iii.* 2), or to Paul as an authority already recognised in a literary form (*iii.* 16), but by the close resemblance of *ii Pet.* to *Jude*, which makes it impossible to separate them in occasion or in time.

That close relation does not seem so well explained by supposing that *Jude* was the original, and *2 Peter* incorporated it in a longer work, though *2 Peter* ii. 13, embodies most of *Jude*, as by recognising a common source, a book for the times, from which the two

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epistles were drawn, the one purporting to come from Jude, the other from the first of the apostles.

One example of the relation between the two may suffice to justify this second theory. In each letter a reference is made to the heretical teachers who appear in the "love-feasts." In Peter ii. 13, they are called  $\sigma\pi\acute{\iota}\lambdaοι$ , "spots," i.e. defilements, in Jude 12 they are called  $\sigma\pi\acute{\iota}\lambdaαδες$ , i.e. "hidden rocks." The two Greek words are similar. But it is not a likely supposition that either writer copied from the other and made this slight alteration. Though if it were a question of copying and altering, there can be little question that *Jude* is far the more original and vigorous. In Jude 12 a number of striking similes to represent the hurtfulness and sterility of the heretics are piled together: "hidden rocks" which wreck the ship, waterless clouds, trees stripped of fruit, wild waves of the sea, wandering stars. II Peter ii. 13 on the other hand, avoiding this profuse imagery, calls the heretics only spots ( $\sigma\pi\acute{\iota}\lambdaοι$ ) and blemishes in the love feasts. A curious alternative reading for  $\alpha\gammaαπ\alpha\acute{\iota}\varsigma$  (love feasts) is  $\alpha\piατ\alpha\acute{\iota}\varsigma$  (deceits). This is adopted by Nestlé, and greatly lessens the parallelism of the two passages.

But whatever is the exact relation between the two, the relation both of subject and phraseology is so close that, if *Jude* is late, *II. Peter* must be as late, or later. The cumulative evidence therefore for the late date applies to both.

Many reverent souls naturally resist the conclusion that these books included in the New Testament

could be what we to-day should perhaps call forgeries. But that sinister term is quite inapplicable. If it is clear, as it certainly is, that the custom prevailed universally in antiquity of giving in the name of distinguished authorities teaching which the writer was too modest to give in his own name, there can be no question of deception. When the author or authors issued these two letters in the name of apostolic men a century or so after their death, there was no wish to deceive anyone, nor was anyone deceived. That method of writing was quite understood, and of unquestioned legitimacy.

*II. Peter*, as Principal Chase says, is closely related to the *Apocalypse of Peter*. It seems to refer to some Petrine documents similar to itself (i. 15). There were many documents issued in the name of the first of the apostles, homilies, letters, apocalypses; it was matter of common knowledge, when they were published, that Peter was not their author. The very number of such documents was a sufficient bar to misconception. Their real character was well known to the readers for whom they were primarily intended. What seems a startling charge of duplicity and fraud, when we are thinking of *II. Peter* as an isolated document, is greatly toned down, and indeed completely altered in character, when we recognise that in the Second Century writings of this kind were recognised and numerous.

Just as Plato wrote long dialogues in which Socrates took the leading part, and yet no one thought that

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these priceless compositions were forgeries, or just as Landor conveyed a wealth of truth and reasoning in the Imaginary Conversations between characters in history, so the religious teacher, a prophet, of the second century would speak to his own times in the name of Peter, or Jude, or James.

If we are puzzled that writings with such a provenance should have found their way into the Canon of Scripture, though late, and should have been accepted for long ages without question as the work of the apostolic men who are their apparent authors, we may say with confidence that they were accepted for their intrinsic merit. There is a quality and a character in both these epistles which justify their place among the writings of the apostles ; and when criticism justifies the belief that they are late in origin—that we may even bring them down into the middle of the second century—we find that we have a valuable picture of the contention for the truth in which the Church has been engaged. We even find these writings more serviceable for our own time, when they are detached from the time when apostles were still living ; we have voices warning and appealing in the midst of the heresies and perversities which beset our own steps.

It is the same story now as at the beginning. From the very first the Faith of our Lord Jesus Christ was assaulted and undermined by heresies. His grace was abused and made the excuse for sensuality. Men speaking as if they were Christian teachers, denied the

Master, contemned lordships, and abused majesties. Promising freedom, they were slaves of corruption, and brought those who listened to them to share their slavery.

It is singular that in these writings which are, in a certain sense now explained, apocryphal we find quotations from what we call apocryphal books. Jude quotes the *Assumption of Moses*, and the *Book of Enoch*, never quoted by the apostolic writers. Enoch says and does what that apocryphal work says, just as we quote what Adam or Satan says in "Paradise Lost" and what Christian says in "Pilgrim's Progress." Both works refer to mythical stories of the fall of angels from their planetary abodes, and II. Peter speaks of them as thrown into Tartarus, the mythical hell of the Greeks (Jude 6, and ii. Peter ii. 4).

*Jude* is an invective against the "ungodly men who were turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness and denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." It is too fierce and vehement to refute them. The argument, if argument there is, is only that the prophets and the apostles had warned us to expect such people, and the doom which would befall them.

Such an invective is very different from Paul's fiery contention with his opponents, in which he plied them with reasoning and appeal; still more different is it from the Master's own indictment of the religious teachers of his time, stronger but less vehement, less fierce but more burning. It is not without the



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ring of sincerity, but the rhetoric suggests very careful study and preparation. In the eleven verses there are the most telling instances quoted from time and eternity to illustrate the position; the erring Israelites, the apostate angels, Sodom and Gomorrah, Michael contending for the body of Moses (in the *Assumption of Moses*), Cain, Balaam, Korah, all the images of danger and futility from Nature, Enoch (from the *Book of Enoch*). (This is the manner of the preacher, the rhetorician, and leaves us unaffected.) One instance of the evil wrought by the heresy, and one clear touch of Christ's truth to refute it, would probably affect the reader more than all this lurid denunciation.

But in the brief document there are some jewels which more than outweigh this frigid rhetoric. At the beginning we have that idea which has given a keynote to the Christian *contentio veritatis*: "Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." And the last six verses give us thoughts and expressions which we can never let go; building up on the holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keeping yourselves in the love of God. Then the mercy of Christ suggests even to this vehement champion of the truth the duty of showing mercy, of saving the victims of error, of keeping the spotless purity of the Master.

And the great benediction: "Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, &c." is one of those inspired passages which give a character to the whole writing in which it occurs and justifies the place it holds in the Canon.



The other epistle is not only longer, but richer in quality, and is not unsuitable to close the Canon of the New Testament. If it had been written by the author of I Peter (its style is singularly different), if it belonged to the earlier Apostolic writings, we should lose this special value, we should not have as the closing note of the New Testament so salutary a warning against that kind of negligence which arises from the delay in the Lord's return. It is some compensation for surrendering the idea that Peter wrote it to find this thought of the Lord himself echoing in our ears when we close the New Testament, which is in so remarkable a manner his book.

First, we have the description of the Divine life on earth, the life given us through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; it is a life of power, the power of God, and means a distinct partaking of the nature of God Himself. It moves on, link depending on link, from faith, with which it begins, to love, in which it is complete. It is a life which is only possible by the calling and election of God, and yet it demands all our diligence to make it sure.

The knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ in its fullness means entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Then follows a beautiful passage in which the writer pictures Peter as an old man about to put off the tabernacle of the flesh, recalling the vision he had of Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration. Often had Mark heard his Master, Peter, describe the event, and

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to Mark we owe the record of it (Mark ix. 2-8), though it is the account in Matthew (xvii. 5), which is quoted by this late writer. This reference to the Gospel narrative in a writer of the second century, as we suppose, calls our attention to the fact that Christianity did not rest on myths and fables, but on a historic fact. The prophets foretold, the life and death of Christ fulfilled, the redeeming plan of God.

That is the firm and deep foundation of the Gospel.

Then follows the denunciation of the false prophets, which is found in Jude. It has been observed that this writer has a command of proverbial philosophy, which gives his writings a character of their own. The images in ii. 22, if not pleasant, are at least pungent.

The last chapter opens with the words which show the intention to keep up the dramatic form, to make Peter speak, although what follows in verse 2 is just what shows that it is only a *dramatis persona* speaking, not the apostle Peter. It then deals with the end of all things, which has been delayed. Already, as we suppose, the first century has passed, and the Lord has not come back. Professor Hogg has made us familiar with the idea that the consummation would have come if men had believed, and will come when they do believe. The Lord expects it in "that generation," and when He was disappointed died, thinking that His death would bring it at once. But unbelief delayed it, had delayed it for a century, might delay

it for a thousand years, or even several thousands of years !

The scoffing denial was already heard : “ all things remain as they were when the fathers fell asleep ; He will not come, surely He will not come.”

The closing passage of the Canon—the voice from the Second Century—advances an argument which is valid throughout the long and unforeseen delay. As the Psalm says (xc. 4), “ one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” The life of God is timeless ; and we cannot speak in terms of time, years, centuries, millennia, when we are discussing His plans. The delay in the Lord’s coming is determined by God’s mercy. Centuries are allowed to pass, to see if humanity will repent and believe. ( Nothing is lost, for the rich harvest of the faithful, the pure, the redeemed, is garnered by the Angel of Death, year after year. They are gathering, the redeemed of the Lord in the sinless world, in the infinite joy of the presence of God. And the Almighty Love pauses, and waits, and gives to mankind yet the opportunity of receiving His Gospel, and exalting His Son.)

But the day of grace will pass at last. Then the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, to use the Lord’s own phrase (Mat. xxiv. 43), Then this ordered world which, as the opening page of the Bible says, was created by the Spirit of God, will be dissolved again into its elements.

The closing page of the Bible has therefore this exact

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correspondence to the beginning. But to its announcement of dissolution is added a glorious promise taken from the prophetic writings both of the Old Testament and of the New, of "a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

This magnificent prospect was first opened in the 2 Isaiah (Is. lxv. 17, lxvi. 22, lx. 21), but New Testament prophecy took it up and echoed it as the result of the victory of Christ (Rev. xxi. 1, 27).

Thus the New Testament closes with a promise and an exhortation. The present order of sinning and repenting, of progress and decline, of good attained only to be lost, will end. A new order of consummate righteousness will come. And the Christian attitude is determined by that expectation.

Holy conduct and piety, living in peace, unstained and unblameable, growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, entering into a participation of the divine nature, by faith and love—this is the closing picture of the New Testament.

Look for the new heavens and the new earth, know that the present things are passing away; live in the world as the soul lives in the body, using it, subduing it, but never subdued by it.

The New Testament is the book of a Transfiguration; it shows us the reality of life, the things which actually are, in the Person of Christ. The world of the senses has only a relative reality; the world of thought, more real, is yet in perpetual flux; but the world revealed in Christ is real and lasting.

The end of the unreal things is always at hand, because, though the world's consummation may linger—the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—at any moment our own summons may come, from the dream of this life into the waking reality of God.

“ His servant, Death, with solving rite  
Turns finite into Infinite.”

*[Faint, illegible handwriting]*

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